



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

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New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Zhang Jun/Mr. Geng Shuang . . . . .	(China)
<i>Members:</i>	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. Abarry
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Thomas-Greenfield
	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 10.25 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and Mr. Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University.

Mr. Wennesland, Mr. Lazzarini and Mr. Khalidi are joining today's meeting via video-teleconference.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** As I brief the Security Council today, a cessation of hostilities is holding between Palestinian militants in Gaza and Israel following 11 days of the most intense hostilities we have witnessed in years. I welcome this agreement as it brings a halt to the violent escalation and allows us to address the most urgent humanitarian needs of the people in Gaza.

At the outset, I wish to thank the Security Council for the support expressed to United Nations efforts to de-escalate the situation, address urgent needs and respond to the aftermath. I also wish to commend the crucial role of Egypt and the United States, and the work of Qatar, which all, in close contact with the United

Nations, were instrumental in bringing this latest round of violence to an end.

The United Nations is coordinating the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, and I highlight the \$95-million humanitarian flash appeal launched today. At the same time, we remain focused on the important political steps that are needed to solidify the cessation of hostilities that began on 21 May.

Those recent events have made clear once again the costs of perpetual conflict and lost hope. The challenges in Gaza — like the conflict as a whole — require political solutions. As we look ahead, our approach cannot be business as usual, and we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Given their magnitude, I will focus today's briefing on the recent escalation and its consequences. Broader developments on the ground will be covered in the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The escalation that engulfed Gaza, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and cities across Israel led to terrible suffering and destruction and took the lives of too many civilians. I share my condolences with all who have lost loved ones or been affected by the fighting.

The hostilities spread amid a spike in tensions in occupied East Jerusalem. Long-standing protests intensified over the potential eviction by Israeli authorities of several Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. In parallel, tensions escalated sharply among Palestinians and Israeli security forces and civilians in and around the Old City, including all the Holy Sites, during the month of Ramadan, leading to clashes and hundreds of arrests and injuries.

The violence was accompanied and amplified by inflammatory statements and incitement, including violent threats issued by senior Hamas leaders, racist chants by Israeli extremists marching near the Old City and provocative visits to Sheikh Jarrah by far-right Israeli members of the Knesset and their supporters

On 10 May, amid a heavy presence of Israeli security forces ahead of the Israeli-organized Jerusalem Day march, thousands of Palestinians clashed with police in and around Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli security forces reportedly shot and injured over 650 Palestinians with rubber-coated metal bullets and other crowd-control

means. Thirty-two Israeli security forces personnel were injured.

Although Israeli authorities took steps to reduce tensions — including by rerouting the march, postponing a Supreme Court hearing on the Sheikh Jarrah evictions and barring Jewish visits to the Holy sites — the violence and heavy security presence continued. That very same day, Hamas fired seven rockets towards Jerusalem, causing some property damage and setting off the escalation of hostilities.

From 10 to 21 May, during ensuing hostilities between Israel and armed groups in Gaza, 253 Palestinians, including at least 66 children, 38 women and three persons with disabilities, were killed during Israeli air strikes and shelling. At least 126 of them were civilians. One journalist was also killed. In some cases, entire families, including women, children and infants, were killed in their homes.

Over the same period, nine Israelis, including two children and five women, and three foreign nationals were killed by rockets and mortars launched indiscriminately by Hamas and other militants in Gaza, and one soldier was killed by an anti-tank missile fired near the Gaza perimeter fence.

Hamas and other militants fired more than 4,000 rockets from Gaza at an unprecedented intensity and scope. A significant number were intercepted by the Iron Dome system and others landed inside Gaza. In Israel, direct hits were reported in multiple locations, causing damage to residential and commercial property, as well as schools and energy infrastructure, including power lines supplying Gaza. Hundreds of Israelis were injured in these attacks.

In Gaza, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted over 1,500 air strikes against what it said were militant targets belonging to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Nevertheless, there was significant damage to homes and civilian infrastructure. During the hostilities, the United Nations and partners reported that at least 57 schools, 9 hospitals and 19 primary health-care centres sustained complete or partial damage. Initial reporting during the hostilities indicated that at least 258 buildings, including four high-rise towers — one hosting international media outlets — were damaged or destroyed. This translates to nearly 2,000 housing and commercial units. The United Nations and partners are currently undertaking a rapid damage and needs

assessment to understand the full scale of destruction and needs on the ground.

According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, 1,948 Palestinians were injured in these strikes and over 112,000 people displaced, with some 77,000 sheltering in nearly 60 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, where they had limited access to water and nearly no access to health care or food. The vast majority have returned home, but approximately 9,000 people remain displaced, with their homes destroyed or uninhabitable.

The violence we have witnessed and its tragic consequences are unacceptable. Civilians should never be the target of violence. Children, in particular, must never be put in harm's way. Journalists must be able to carry out their work without fear of attack or harassment.

Throughout the hostilities, the United Nations worked tirelessly with all sides to restore calm, including through calls from the Secretary-General on Israel and Palestinian armed groups to take immediate and decisive steps to de-escalate the situation and prevent any further loss of life. The Security Council convened four times to discuss ways to end the hostilities, and the General Assembly held a special debate on the crisis (see A/75/PV.70). The sustained attention of the international community provided crucial momentum to ceasefire efforts at decisive moments in time.

On 20 May, Israel and Hamas announced that they had agreed to a cessation of hostilities, which went into effect in the early morning hours of 21 May. It has since held, with no further rockets or air strikes reported.

The humanitarian impact of the fighting on Gaza has been devastating, compounding an already-dire situation. Humanitarian access was limited to only five trucks of fuel for UNRWA installations, which entered via Kerem Shalom on 18 May. Due to rockets fired from Gaza, the majority of planned humanitarian supplies on that day were not able to cross.

Following the cessation of hostilities, on 21 May, 40 truckloads of humanitarian supplies were permitted entry. On 25 May, Israel announced the opening of the crossings for certain humanitarian goods and personnel, including a shipment of over 46,000 thousand COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility vaccines. It is critical that a predictable schedule for the entry of all humanitarian materials and personnel be put in place at both crossings. In addition, Israel reinstated the fishing

zone off the Gaza coast on 25 May to six nautical miles, which had been fully closed during the hostilities.

Repair to some damaged sewage and water infrastructure has commenced. The entry of fuel purchased through the United Nations for the Gaza power plant has been barred by Israel since 10 May. Gaza authorities reported that fuel purchased from Egypt has been used to ensure that it continues to function, albeit at reduced capacity, resulting in an average of five hours of electricity per day. The Gaza power plant is the only source of large-scale electricity supply within Gaza, critical to ensuring that hospitals, health clinics and water and sanitation facilities can operate.

The health-care system, already overwhelmed by chronic drug shortages, inadequate equipment and the coronavirus disease pandemic, will likely be unable to meet the needs of those injured during the violence.

Propelled by events in Gaza and East Jerusalem, there has also been a sharp rise in the number of clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, settler-related violence and Palestinian attacks against Israelis in the occupied West Bank, as well as an apparent increase in the use of live ammunition by the Israeli security forces against Palestinians participating in demonstrations.

I reiterate that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable. Israeli forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable, in order to protect life.

Potential evictions in occupied East Jerusalem also continue to be a major concern. On 9 May, the Supreme Court temporarily postponed the eviction of several families from Sheikh Jarrah until a hearing could be held on their appeal. Nevertheless, they and many others in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan face the risk of displacement, with eviction cases commenced by settler organizations currently pending before Israeli courts.

I reiterate that all settlement activity is illegal under international law, and I urge Israel to cease demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and to allow Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to develop their communities.

The violence in Gaza has reverberated in the immediate region, particularly in Lebanon. Since my last briefing on 16 May (see S/2021/480), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) detected

several rockets fired from southern Lebanon towards Israel on 17 and 19 May, one of which impacted east of Haifa. The IDF fired artillery rounds in response, impacting north of the Blue Line. No injuries or damages were reported. In addition, a number of demonstrations were organized throughout Lebanon to express solidarity with the Palestinians. On 23 May, over 900 protesters gathered in demonstrations in southern Lebanon, including close to the Blue Line. In the Shaba'a area, several individuals briefly crossed south of the Blue Line and placed flags on the Israeli technical fence. Throughout, UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon have engaged the parties to defuse tensions. As a preventive measure, UNIFIL, in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has maintained a strong presence along the Blue Line and remained in close contact with both parties.

This is not the first time we have witnessed the end of a war in Gaza. Each time, those who lose the most are the civilians. The loss and trauma extend far beyond the period of hostilities. Ending the violence and taking immediate steps to address the humanitarian consequences are crucial priorities, but we cannot stop there. This reality — and avoiding the recurrence of hostilities — should be the point of departure for us all as we look toward sustainable, long-term solutions to this conflict.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to the international community to work with the United Nations on developing an integrated, robust package of support for a swift recovery and sustainable rebuilding that supports the Palestinian people and strengthens their institutions. I am committed to ensuring that the United Nations plays its part. We must avoid the pull of short-term fixes and focus instead on how to work towards resolving the deadlock in Gaza and the Palestinian divide, which have remained unresolved for over 14 years and require real political solutions.

Palestinian national unity and the return of a legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza are needed to ensure sustainability. At the same time, we must create a political horizon that allows the parties to return to the path of meaningful negotiations. To that end, I remain in close contact with my fellow Envoys in the Middle East Quartet, key Arab and international partners, and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

After decades of conflict, it is the lack of a proverbial light at the end of the tunnel — of a political horizon — that kills hope and provides space for those not interested in sustainable peace. Only through negotiations that end the occupation and create a viable two-State solution on the basis of all relevant resolutions, international law and mutual agreements, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, can we hope to bring a definitive end to these senseless and costly cycles of violence.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lazzarini.

**Mr. Lazzarini**: Allow me to express my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to address the Security Council today. I am addressing the Council from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) headquarters in East Jerusalem, only a few hundred metres from the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, where eight Palestinian refugee families face the threat of forced eviction from their homes.

I am also addressing the Security Council after having spent part of the week in Gaza listening to countless stories of the tragic loss of loved ones. Following 11 days of air strikes by Israeli military forces and rocket attacks launched by Palestinian armed groups, more than 250 people were killed in Gaza, including 66 children, of whom 19 went to UNRWA schools. In Israel, 12 people, including two children were killed. All losses of innocent civilian lives are unacceptable. I extend my deep condolences to those who lost loved ones. In addition, thousands more were injured. These are not just statistics; they are civilians whose lives and dreams have been taken away.

Let me pause for a moment to acknowledge and show my appreciation for my UNRWA colleagues in Gaza, who — under the leadership of Director Matthias Schmale — were on the front line to protect and assist the population. Every morning, they overcame the gripping fear and made the dangerous journey to our health centres and schools, turned into shelters, in order to help those in need. They went to work without knowing whether the families would still be alive at the end of the day. Our health and sanitation workers, our social workers and engineers worked relentlessly for 11 days in what they described to me as “hell on Earth” — hell, because for 11 days there was no

respite in the fighting, no humanitarian truce to allow for emergency medical assistance to the wounded, no relief for the displaced and no ability to simply get food without the risk of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was hell for 70,000 people who sought refuge in our schools because living under blockade left them with no other place to seek protection. It was hell because of the intensity of the relentless air strikes on densely populated areas in the heart of Gaza.

Almost everyone I met described feeling terrified and traumatized. I met parents who every night asked themselves whether to have all the children sleep near them or to spread them around the house. Should they all die together or should they try to save some by scattering them? An UNRWA colleague described how she discussed dinner plans with her sister on the last day of Ramadan. An hour later, the sister and her daughter were killed in an air strike. The daughter’s wedding had been planned for the following week.

I met a man from the Abu Hatab family who lost 10 loved ones, including his wife and four children, when his building collapsed. He had gone out to buy food and returned to see his entire universe shattered. Days after the event, he still wonders what happened and why his only surviving child has stopped speaking. I had no answer to give him.

The most recent conflict is the first such conflict in 14 years. Every conflict destroys lives, buildings, basic infrastructure and sends Gaza back many years. These conflicts happen against the backdrop of an enduring blockade that, for 14 years, has crippled the economy, has led to skyrocketing unemployment and has brought Gaza’s health-care system to its knees, undermining its current capacity to respond the surge of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and meet the needs of the injured.

The international humanitarian community has now shifted from emergency mode to assessing the totality of the damage done to homes, infrastructure and, most importantly, human lives. I am especially concerned about the trauma and psychosocial impact that relentless air strikes and rocket attacks have inflicted on civilians, especially children. I am also concerned about a new wave of COVID-19 infections among the population in Gaza, as access to the vaccine becomes more urgent than ever.

Last week, I met some members of the Sheikh Jarrah families in East Jerusalem. Mohammed Al-Kourid

shared his feelings of injustice and fear — injustice because his family faces a second forced displacement, fear of the deliberate harassment of those who wish to expel him from his childhood home. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, thousands of people like Mohammed live in fear, with eviction and demolition orders pending on their homes and property.

During the escalation in Gaza, not enough public attention was paid to the serious protection situation in the West Bank, which has affected Palestine, refugees and civilians alike. We saw a major increase in Israeli security forces' incursions, search and arrest operations, and settler violence. Of particular concern was the heavy use of live ammunition during demonstrations where Palestinian refugees were among the injured and killed.

I am also concerned by the potential excessive and misuse of non-lethal weaponry, such as tear gas, in and around the narrow alleys of Palestinian refugee camps. Repeated exposure might create health challenges that derive from tear gas seeping into homes and sticking to clothes.

Despair is spreading in Palestinian refugee camps beyond the occupied Palestinian territory. Despair and loss of hope makes a dangerous mix in a highly volatile region, particularly for youth, who feel increasingly disenfranchised and trapped.

In Lebanon, nearly the entire population in the camps lives under the poverty line. During my last visit I saw hopelessness growing. I met a young Palestinian refugee who said he constantly asked himself whether he would die from COVID-19, from hunger or from trying to cross the Mediterranean on a dinghy.

During my last visit to Syria, I saw children in school uniforms emerging from the rubble of the Yarmouk camp to jump on an UNRWA bus. Their families had come to live amid debris because they could no longer afford to pay rent.

In Jordan, despite relative stability, the pandemic dealt a huge blow to the economy. Again, the most vulnerable — Palestinian refugees, especially those who have fled from Syria — are hit hardest.

Until there is a political solution to this conflict, including a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, only a strong UNRWA can bring a sense of normalcy into refugees' lives. That sense

of normalcy can contribute to the quest for peace and stability.

But with a strong UNRWA, young Palestinian refugees, girls and boys alike, can go very far thanks to quality education.

Loay Elbasyouni, one of the engineers behind the American helicopter that went to Mars, is a former student of an UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun in Gaza. He went from Gaza to NASA. That is how far our students can go when they are empowered. Like their peers elsewhere, they have unlimited potential.

A strong UNRWA requires predictable and sufficient funding for adequate planning and delivery of services. It is one of the most cost-effective investments that Member States can make. It is an investment in human beings and in the human development of Palestinian refugees. It is an investment in the values and principles of the United Nations.

Our pedagogy, based on the United Nation values of human rights and tolerance, promote a sense of purpose. This year alone, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Bank and the British Council all acknowledged the excellence of an UNRWA education.

The education we provide is an antidote to the widespread violence, hatred and intolerance spreading in the region. Weakening UNRWA will only fuel existing division. I am asking Member States to stand by the Agency and support UNRWA from repeated political attacks that seek to undermine its role and its mandate.

UNRWA is an agency that advocates refugee rights in accordance with international law, including relevant United Nations resolutions. Those who believe that, by undermining the reputation of the legitimacy of the Agency, they can somehow erase the Palestinian refugee issue, are fooling themselves. Not only is it discriminatory to erase or ignore history, but such erasure is also based on misinformation and the denial of established fact. Palestinian refugees derive their status and rights from international law, the same law that strives to promote peace and equality. By seeking to weaken UNRWA, those who attack it only weaken the prospects for peace.

Last week was a stark reminder that war and violence persists in the absence of genuine and comprehensive efforts aimed at resolving the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. Putting on hold the political track by containing the conflict should not be an option anymore.

In conclusion, I would like to share the following recommendations for Council members' consideration. First — and we heard this from the Special Coordinator — we need to break the Sisyphean approach to the post-conflict response in Gaza, which is a response limited to humanitarian and recovery assistance, will not prevent the next round of conflict. The recovery phase needs to be accompanied by a genuine political track aimed at lifting the blockade on people, goods and trade, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Secondly, I echo the Special Coordinator's call for perpetrators of violations of international law on all sides to be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

Thirdly, to prevent further escalation of tensions in West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, forced evictions and administrative demolitions contrary to international law should end.

Fourthly, humanitarian and reconstruction efforts should be fully funded, and efforts to scale up the availability of COVID-19 vaccines should be supported.

In conclusion, no one has asked to remain a refugee for seven decades. Every Palestinian refugee I meet wants a normal life, including the right to live without fear and without discrimination. Like all people, they have an equal right to the enjoyment of their human rights in accordance with international law, which means that children can play and go to school, parents can protect and take care of their children, and young people have dreams. It also means living in peace, not fearful of the next conflict. Together, we must ensure that the sense of normalcy and stability remains in the lives of Palestinian refugees through a strong UNRWA.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Lazzarini for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Khalidi.

**Mr. Khalidi:** I am deeply grateful to the Security Council and the Chinese presidency for the opportunity to brief the Council, particularly at what may be a new juncture in the evolution of the question of Palestine.

All Palestinians, wherever they are — in occupied Arab East Jerusalem, where the latest round of

violence started a few weeks ago, in the occupied West Bank, in besieged Gaza, inside Israel, and in the vast Palestinian diaspora — have responded to the events of the past several weeks with an unprecedented degree of unity. These events, and this show of unity, have provoked a worldwide recognition of the realities on the ground — realities of systemic discrimination, oppression and settler colonialism — that can no longer be brushed aside and hidden by stale clichés. Young people and people of conscience the world over have responded to the images that emerged from different parts of Palestine, and which were diffused especially by social media, but also by mainstream media. Public discourse has begun to shift in consequence.

On 9 June 1967, at the height of the June 1967 war, as a college student, I sat in the visitors' gallery of this very Chamber where the Council is sitting, watching as a permanent member ensured the impunity that allowed a Member State to ignore Security Council ceasefire resolutions and continue its military offensive for another 24 hours. This action nearly 54 years ago exacerbated problems that this body is still wrestling with. The same pattern of guaranteeing impunity for violations of international law and Security Council resolutions has recurred repeatedly since then, most recently during the Council's deliberations on the events in Palestine earlier this month.

As all Council members know, since the founding of the United Nations, the Security Council has adopted multiple resolutions on the Palestine problem and the Israeli-Arab conflict. Such issues that have taken up more of the time and energy of this organ than any other global issue. Most of those resolutions have not been implemented or respected. In effect, they are in effect dead letters. That systematic disrespect for Security Council resolutions, encouraged by the impunity that I have described, has left the Council and the United Nations itself, I am sad to say, in justifiable disrepute. More seriously, such impunity has been a major obstacle to establishing peace, justice and security for all those who live in Palestine and Israel.

However, I have not been asked to brief on the failings of the past. Instead, I hope to offer suggestions based on my understanding of the history of the issue, in order to reinforce the efforts of this organ to achieve lasting peace and security in Palestine and Israel in the future.

It is clear to me, and I hope that it is clear to Council members, that, whatever their merits, a number of important palliatives currently under consideration are not by themselves going to produce a lasting solution to the problems of Palestine and Israel. They include rebuilding the degraded infrastructure of Gaza with no guarantee that it will not be destroyed for a fifth time; stressing the quality of life for Palestinians without providing them with a clear and fixed political horizon; and, finally, yet again launching a meaningless peace process, structured by the most powerful actors to avoid all the difficult core issues central to achieving a sustainable resolution of the issue.

Any effort to achieve real peace and lasting security must belatedly grapple with those painful core issues, which go back to the first efforts of the General Assembly and the Council to deal with the question of Palestine in the earliest years following the establishment of the United Nations.

What are those core issues? They are the dispossession of the Palestinian people, starting in 1948; the status of Jerusalem; the supposedly temporary military occupation that has endured since 1967; and ensuring that any projected solution is grounded in international law and in the resolutions of the Council and is not based on what happens to be convenient for the most powerful actors involved in the issue.

I am a historian of the Middle East and a long-time observer of the proceedings of the Security Council, where my father worked for nearly two decades as a member of the Secretariat. I understand perfectly that power relations structure what is possible and what is impossible. I understand perfectly how difficult it is to make national agendas coincide such that collective action becomes possible.

However, if there were a moment to transcend those restraints and for collective action to address a source of suffering that has endured for the better part of a century, this is it. The most recent upheaval in Palestine and Israel has sharpened contradictions, aroused new passions, some of them ugly, and awakened consciences. It has also pricked the bubble of cherished illusions, such as the illusion that no one in the Arab world or globally cares about Palestine. The solidarity marches, the social media explosion, the unprecedented nature of the mainstream media coverage of recent events and the unprecedented wave of solidarity with the Palestinians the world over — all those phenomena together show

that, however much some may wish that this were not the case, Palestine is important and cannot be ignored. They also show that the Palestinians will not give up their struggle to achieve their inalienable rights. A problem that for decades many have hoped would disappear has reappeared in an even more intense and troubling form.

It is therefore time to call a spade a spade and to abandon the cruel false equivalence that ignores casualty ratios of from 4, 10 or 20 to 1, that places the occupier on the same footing as the occupied and that puts a nuclear-armed regional super-Power on the same footing as a people that has never been allowed to enjoy self-determination. If that false equivalence is maintained and if the lopsided balance of power between the two peoples is allowed to dictate outcomes, there will never be an end to such bloodletting and oppression, and the Security Council will continue to issue empty resolutions with no force for the rest of the twenty-first century, as it has done for the many of the decades.

How can the impunity that enormous power grants to one side be overcome? In my view, what are needed are both small steps and big ones. Small steps can include this organ urgently demanding, not requesting from the blockading Powers, but demanding, under penalty of sanctions, that the humanitarian, medical, dietary and other basic needs of the people of Gaza be freed of cruel political considerations and that the collective punishment of 2 million people be ended. Surely that small step is within the power of the Security Council. I think that all can see how doing that, which requires forceful action, would improve the situation in Palestine.

Small steps include the Security Council working to help cement the unity of the Palestinian people on a democratic basis — a unity that the colonial Power has worked ceaselessly to undermine. That could include United Nations-mandated and -supervised elections that cannot be obstructed either by the occupying Power or by outside Powers that cultivate proxies and meddle in Palestinian affairs.

Small steps may include the demand that the status quo regarding the holy sites in Jerusalem — a status quo that has been systematically infringed upon — be strictly respected by all. That status quo goes back not only to the many United Nations resolutions on Jerusalem or to the British Mandate period; it is rooted

in the era of Ottoman rule, and it was hammered out over many decades of war and diplomacy. As we have seen in recent weeks, it is playing with fire, an unholy fire, to allow that status quo to be trampled upon, as has been happening for all too many decades, both in the period of Jordanian rule of the eastern part of the city and, especially, since the Israeli occupation and annexation of 1967.

Larger steps should include forcefully reiterating the basic building blocks of the international order, as far as Palestine is concerned, as they have been laid down in Security Council and other United Nations resolutions. Those include the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, central to the principle of resolution 242 (1967), adopted by this organ in November 1967; the illegality of the colonization of occupied territory by the occupier's citizens, as set out in the Fourth Geneva Convention; the right of refugees to return and to compensation, as set out in General Assembly resolution 181 (II); and the necessity of an international role in resolving the question of Jerusalem, as had been set out in repeated Security Council resolutions.

For the Council simply to reiterate clearly and explicitly that those building blocks, all of which are rooted in international law and United Nations resolutions, are the only possible basis of a just and lasting solution would ameliorate the situation immeasurably. I understand how difficult it may be to achieve unanimity today, even on those points, every single one of which has been voted for unanimously or nearly unanimously by the Council or other United Nations bodies in the past, but simply reiterating them is crucially important.

Another larger step would be for the Council to assert its prerogatives and forcefully push for a more multilateral and less unilateral structure for the resolution of the Palestine question. The unilateral approach, which has prevailed since the Gunnar Jarring mission, which was eclipsed towards the end of the 1960s, a half century ago, has manifestly failed to bring peace to Palestine or to Israel, and it is time for it to be replaced by more multilateral and less biased efforts. I understand that power has its prerogatives and cannot be ignored, but it is time to realize that a century of unmitigated failure should bring this organ to search for a better, a more multilateral, way to structure a negotiation than the unilateral one that has been followed with no success until now.

A much bigger step, albeit one that should not be so hard for this organ to adopt, or for the world community to accept, is the principle that, in any projected solution in Palestine-Israel, all citizens of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and both collectivities must enjoy rights and security on a basis of complete equality. Whatever rights one enjoys, the other must enjoy as well. Those rights include the right of self-determination and political, civil, human and religious rights.

That is not such a far-fetched notion. In November 1947, the General Assembly voted for the creation of two States in Palestine. One was eventually established, one was not. For all its many flaws and the injustice to the overwhelming Arab majority of the Palestinian population that it embodied at that time, General Assembly resolution 181 (II) contained one kernel that we can look back on and build on: that is the indisputable principle that two peoples live in Palestine/Israel. In whatever way those two peoples are to structure their relations in the future — whether on a two-State or some other basis — the weaker cannot be left to the mercies of the stronger, with its powerful ally putting its thumb on the already tilted scales. That is where the Security Council can and must play a role by insisting that the principle of complete equality of rights and international law be the essential basis of any lasting solution.

I know a little bit of the difficulties that the representatives of Council members and the States they represent must confront in dealing with this intractable issue. I understand that it is an issue that has profound resonance within the internal politics of their countries and provokes intense passions on all sides. Nevertheless, this is the moment to grasp that sharp nettle to bring concepts of right, principle, justice and equality to bear in order to overcome the decades of expediency that have given the hollow shell of a process, but have manifestly not brought peace to Palestine or to the two peoples who live there. As I have recently written, rather than bringing peace, the efforts of the United Nations and outside parties in Palestine have all too often failed to prevent further displacement, further misery, further war. May the opportunity presented by the most recent crisis in Palestine and Israel lead the Security Council to efforts that will break that pattern and set the two peoples on the path towards a just, lasting and sustainable peace and real, equal security.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Khalidi for his briefing. I would like to thank

him for sharing his proposals and views based on his long-term research. At the same time, I would like to thank the other two briefers for their contributions to the meeting.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for your valuable efforts during this month since the beginning of the aggression directed against us. We also thank all our brothers and friends in the Security Council who have cooperated with you, Sir, to put an end to that aggression since it began. Indeed, several formal meetings of the Security Council have been held — be they open or closed or at the ministerial level — to put an end to the aggression against our Palestinian people, our holy sites and our property. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General and Mr. Tor Wennesland for their efforts to achieve peace and justice in our region. On behalf of Palestine, I wish to thank Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for all the services provided by UNRWA to millions of Palestinian refugees. In the same vein, I wish very much to thank my friend and brother Professor Rashid Khalidi for his valuable briefing.

Israel has failed. Israel has failed in defeating Palestinian consciousness and in breaking up our national affiliation. Over the course of 73 years, Israel has developed the most cunning policies and adopted the worst practices, has wielded threats by adopting the gravest plans and imposed the strongest sanctions. Israel has invested enormous resources towards changing the historic, geographic and demographic status in our homeland, believing that eventually a Palestinian generation will acknowledge defeat and surrender to it.

Today, after more than 70 years since the Nakba, Israel's scheme is falling apart in the face of the courage of young Palestinians who are more attached to their homeland and their life, believing in unity and in the inevitability of victory. Generation after generation, we have remained dedicated to Palestine — we carry the colour of its soil — simply because there is no alternative to justice and freedom. No occupation can last forever, regardless of the occupier's military might, military technology or its colonial policies.

Israel has also failed in misleading the peoples of the world: its colonialist and racist face is plain for

all to see. Its arguments are obsolete. It is no longer possible for Israel to hide behind aggressive reactions by accusing all those who dare to criticize its occupation and call for its end and all those who express their solidarity with Palestine and its just cause. There is a worldwide generation that stands unafraid of Israel and its threats.

After what has happened today, how can Israel continue to hide the apartheid regime it imposes, which is visible everywhere from the river to the sea? How can Israel justify the so-called right of return of Jews 5,000 years later while denying the right of Palestinians to return to their land and homes after 73 years? How can Israel justify the forced displacement in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan under the pretence of alleged property for Jews while denying the property rights of Palestinians all over historic Palestine? How can Israel justify the racial nationalism act that grants rights to Jews and deprives the Palestinians of those rights? How can Israel justify the demolition of our homes, our properties and our fields? How can it justify stealing our water and our livelihoods while at the same time claiming its right to build illegal settlements, military checkpoints and even a wall on our land? How can Israel justify violence? How can it justify attacks on Christian and Muslim holy sites while claiming that its colonization is quite simply a divine, ideological right? How can Israel call for the release of its bodies while Palestinian bodies pile up, corpses refrigerated, with families unable even to give them a dignified burial?

How will Israel justify saying that it has an absolute right to so-called self-defence at a time when any Palestinian who defends her home, family, land, right to practice her religion or access to holy sites is considered a criminal? These are the same Palestinians that face soldiers and military forces.

How can Israel justify the fact that its courts condemn Palestinians who are simply exercising their rights? How can it justify that its courts condemn the fact that Palestinian children are seeking refuge when Palestinian children are attacked and killed among their families with their parents? How is all of this going to be justified? Who will believe Israel after all of this?

Did the Security Council not receive the many United Nations reports sounding the alarm about the catastrophic situation in Gaza? We have heard a lot of the information in such reports delivered to us today: those reports issued a warning regarding a situation

on the verge of collapse. We were warned about the possible resumption of violence for the past 15 years as a result of the resumption of Israeli violence. Did Palestinians not speak out during the Great March of Return? They spoke out to ask for the lifting of the siege, which United Nations experts believe violates international law and constitutes collective punishment against Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Did we not come, time after time, to warn of the consequences of Israeli attacks on holy Islamic and Christian sites and East Jerusalem? We spoke out against acts of provocation at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the policy of forcible displacement in the Old City, Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, and indeed in all of Palestine. Did Israel not come over and again to the Council, displaying stubbornness and resorting always to the argument of anti-Semitism to justify its grave violations as if it were entitled to act as if above the law?

Israel attacks anyone who calls for an end to its settlement policy in the West Bank, for respect for the character and status of Jerusalem, as well as of the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and for the lifting of the blockade over the Gaza Strip.

Israel has not upheld its legal obligations as an occupying Power. The deterioration of the situation in the occupied State of Palestine, as seen recently in Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, is of Israel's making. It is an inevitable result of its oppressive policies and colonialist occupation.

Before the Council here today, we stress the need to end Israeli aggression against Gaza. But putting an end to that recent aggression did not end the catastrophe. It did not restore the lives of fallen martyrs. It did not return houses that were destroyed. It did not spare orphans the loss of their parents, or bring back the loved ones of the bereaved.

The postponement by the Israeli courts of decisions on the forcible displacement of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan did not free families from the ongoing aggression by settlers, or spare them the tragedy endured in occupied Jerusalem. It did not mean that Israel's provocations that the Al-Aqsa Mosque have ceased, or that measures to change the status of the city and its character have stopped. This has not put an end to Israel's colonial appetite, or the desire to annex occupied Palestinian land, remove Palestinians from their land, or besiege them on it. It does not put an end to restrictions on their freedoms.

As Professor Khalidi has said, today we all stand at a crossroads. If we leave things to Israel, it will simply choose the same path and the same approach. Israel will choose to impose apartheid upon us. It will choose annexation, besiegement, blockade and destruction. At the same time, it will demand security and stability for itself, because Israel does not acknowledge the failure of its colonialist and racist policies, which are the source of violence and the root cause of the conflict.

We Palestinians will not surrender. We will not be subjugated by this miserable occupation. That is what Israel must understand. That is the reality Israel must face. The Palestinian people — young and old, women and men — will not throw in the towel. The Palestinian people will continue to call for freedom, independence and self-determination. We will accept only the path that leads to the freedom of our people, upholds our national dignity and guarantees all our rights as enshrined in international law.

With regard to the Security Council and the international community, for decades they have set out an international vision for peace. The Council's resolutions have defined the bases and parameters for a solution. It also determined the obligations of the parties and obligations on countries not to recognize illegal actions or support the perpetrators of such actions. The Council also called for the need to distinguish between occupied territory and the territory of the occupying Power. And it called for respect for international law. It is now up to the Council to implement those resolutions and establish a just and comprehensive peace as foreseen in various resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, including resolution 2334 (2016).

The Council has preserved the international consensus against all attempts to legitimize occupation and colonization and to distort the terms of reference. Now that the Trump Administration has gone, and along with it the propaganda and illusions it sought to promote, the United States has returned to the international consensus and the Quartet has been reactivated, it is no longer enough to simply reiterate the provisions of international law. We have full respect for international law, of course. Quite simply, the Council is duty-bound to implement it.

Please do not ask us to be patient. We have been so patient. Jacob was the prophet of patience, and our patience has run out — because, as every hour passes,

we endure more suffering. For how long are we supposed to be patient — until the next massacre occurs, until children under occupation grow into adults, until a family is displaced for the third or fourth time, or until the settlements expand to ultimately cut off the veins of life in Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley? Does the Council want us to be patient until an entire generation grows up knowing nothing but siege and deprivation?

The battle for existence in Palestine, and Jerusalem at its heart, is taking place on the ground, house by house, and in the alleys of the Old City, in our Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Sepulchre, and on every hilltop, neighbourhood, village and camp. Peace cannot be achieved in the city of peace without the recognition of Palestinian sovereignty and respect of the Hashemite custodianship.

The Council's responsibility is not only to adopt resolutions here, although we value that, but to change the reality there in order to protect the Palestinians there and to ensure that freedom and peace prevail there.

The reconstruction of the besieged Gaza Strip must be a top priority right now, as we have heard and which we welcome, starting with providing immediate health care and humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced persons, especially in the context of the pandemic. But the Council and we know well that the solution in Gaza Strip must be a radical one in a manner consistent with the unity of our people, land and destiny, while lifting the Israeli blockade completely against Gaza and ensuring the freedom of movement of people and goods. That would ensure the revival of economic life, the provision of fuel, medical equipment, medicine and construction material, as well as the sustainable functioning of the power plant so as to end the humanitarian tragedy that the Palestinian people in Gaza have endured for the past 15 years. It would also allow the youth in Gaza to achieve their maximum potential and creativity.

The past few weeks have demonstrated that Israel's claim — that the question of Palestine no longer inhabits the hearts and minds of peoples in the Arab and Muslim world or of peoples worldwide, and that it has become a marginal issue — is false and void. The Palestinian question cannot be overlooked or ignored neither regionally nor internationally. We commend all regional and international efforts to put an end to the Israeli aggression against Gaza and to launch a serious political process that places Palestine, which is the Middle East

cause, at the top of the list of priorities. We reiterate, however, that the success of such a political process will be contingent on ending the ongoing aggression against our people, our land and our sanctities, and on the ability of the Council to implement its resolutions, as well as on the international community's ability to reject double standards and to enforce respect of the international rules adopted and enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in addition to international law and all international resolutions.

Despite all of the killing and destruction, we, the Palestinian people, are a living nation that thrives because of its history, legacy, civilization, culture, poetry, dreams, creativity, bravery, diversity, love, anger, tolerance, patriotism and humanity. We resemble our land and belong to it, and will never abandon it; either we live in it or it lives in us as generations of revolutionaries follow one after another, "like twenty impossibles", as said by one of our great poets. Here in Palestine, we have a past, a present and a future — regardless of who agrees and who objects.

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

**Mrs. Furman** (Israel): It has been nearly a week since the ceasefire came into effect, and while some things are clear, a few things remain to be seen. It is clear that this is not a conflict between Israel and the people of Gaza or between Israelis and Palestinians. This is a conflict between Israel and Hamas.

The people of Gaza are victims of Hamas and are not our enemy. It is clear that the full responsibility for the escalation lies with Hamas — an internationally designated terrorist organization with an ideology similar to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams. Hamas indiscriminately fired over 4,300 rockets at innocent civilians in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and other cities throughout Israel. That is an average of roughly 400 rockets a day. Any other country facing similar threats to its citizens would have responded just as Israel did.

It is also clear that this escalation had nothing to do with the legal dispute in Sheikh Jarrah or with the events in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. During the month of Ramadan and throughout the rest of the year, hundreds of thousands of Muslims pray peacefully at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It was Hamas, not Israel, that disrupted the peace, incited extremists to stockpile rocks and

firebombs in the Holy Mosque, which were then thrown at Jewish worshippers and the police.

Israel had to restore the peace, consistent with its long-standing policy to ensure the freedom of worship in all holy sites in Jerusalem. The events at the Al-Aqsa Mosque were used by Hamas as an excuse for terror. There is never an excuse for terror, which should always be condemned. One cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that the actions of Hamas to escalate and inflame tensions had very little to do with Israel and were directly related to internal Palestinian politics, with Hamas attempting to assert its pre-eminence over the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's operations succeeded in destroying a significant part of the terror infrastructure of Hamas. Israel targeted over 1,500 terror assets in Gaza. Over 100 kilometres of the group's network of terror tunnels were destroyed and more than 200 terrorists were neutralized. We carried out those operations while doing everything in our power to limit civilian casualties.

Israel is deeply saddened by the civilian casualties in Gaza. Every loss of life is a tragedy. As a country that puts the sanctity of life above all else, we mourn the loss of every innocent person taken by this conflict. It is clear that Hamas, on the other hand, committed a double war crime of firing at Israeli civilians while hiding behind Palestinian civilians. Moreover, Hamas cynically tries to drive up the number of casualties on their own side and have the Security Council blame Israel for those tragic losses. It is crucial to remember that Hamas is responsible for the fatalities on both sides. Israel conducts its operations in strict accordance with the law of armed conflict, including the rules relating to distinction, precautions in attack and proportionality.

The Security Council's response to the facts mentioned above is worrying. In its press statement (SC/14527), the Council completely ignored the launching of over 4,300 rockets at Israeli civilians from within populated areas in Gaza. The Council did not even acknowledge that 680 of those rockets misfired and landed short, in Gaza, killing and injuring dozens of Palestinians. Moreover, the Council ignores the fact that, during the transfer of humanitarian aid into Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing, Hamas deliberately fired mortar shells towards the crossing, killing two civilians and injuring many others. Due to those attacks, the border crossing had to be closed for the safety and

security of all those involved, and civilian international aid donations could not enter Gaza.

In fact, the Security Council press statement ignored Hamas altogether. How can there be a statement about a ceasefire necessitated by the actions of a terrorist organization without mentioning it at all or recognizing the role that Iran plays in arming, funding and training this terrorist organization? Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh publicly boasted about receiving funds, weapons and technological know-how from Iran — proving once again what a destructive role Iran plays in the region.

Another thing that was completely ignored in the press statement was the issue of the captive or missing Israeli persons being held by Hamas in Gaza. Israel is committed to the fate of Hadar Golding, Oron Shaul, Avera Mangistu and Hisham al-Sayed, and insists that the international community does everything in its power to ensure their return.

Ignoring these things will not make them go away. In fact, in this case, it will only make them worse. The members of the Security Council and the international community must condemn Hamas and express their support for Israel's right to defend its citizens. We thank the countries that have already done so.

The Security Council must also call for the disarmament of Hamas. Any assistance sent to the Palestinian people must not fall into the hands of terrorists. Effective mechanisms must be put in place to ensure this does not happen. Failing to condemn Hamas or attempting to create any sort of moral equivalency between a murderous terrorist organization and a democratic country acting in accordance with international law encourages terrorism, promotes anti-Semitism, hurts the Palestinians living in Gaza and destroys any chance for dialogue.

Hamas indiscriminately fired rockets at innocent Israeli civilians while using Palestinians as human shields because it knows that too many in the international community will give it a free pass. They know that the blame for the loss of life will be placed on Israel. And unfortunately, once again, some have proven them right.

The inability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to mention Hamas, let alone condemn the Islamic terror group for attacking humanitarian

aid convoys or for indiscriminately firing rockets into Israeli civilian population in effect strengthened Hamas' terrorist objectives. Even Tor Wennesland, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, stated that the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars violates international humanitarian law and must cease immediately.

But UNRWA, instead of exerting its influence on Hamas to stop the indiscriminate firing towards Israel, was engaged during Operation Guardian of the Walls in twisting the facts through false tweets and in spreading politicized propaganda, which is incompatible with the Agency's mandate. Every statement made about the operation failing to condemn Hamas or acknowledging the responsibility for war crimes actively encourages the organization to continue with its terrorism.

But the danger in such statements does not stop with putting the lives of more Israelis and Palestinians at risk. It also put the lives of Jews all around the world at risk, including in Council members' own countries. By blaming Israel for the death of Palestinians caused by Hamas be it by direct attacks or by using them as human shields, by accusing Israel of advancing a disproportionate response based on a simplistic comparison of Israeli and Palestinian casualties, one feeds into Hamas' propaganda machine and fans the flames of anti-Semitism.

While rockets were targeting Israeli civilians, Jews and Jewish institutions were targeted by pro-Palestinian mobs around the world. Verbal and physical attacks became part of legitimate discourse, putting Jewish citizens in situations where their lives were endangered. Blaming Jews for the deaths caused by a terrorist group feeds into the oldest of anti-Semitic tropes. The results of these dangerous statements have already begun to appear. We could see and hear clearly the anti-Semitic attacks coming out of the pro-Palestinian rallies and demonstrations — attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions, alongside the demonization of Israel and the call for its annihilation.

Never has there been a clearer example of the fact that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. The connection between anti-Zionism and the hateful anti-Semitic attacks against Jews was made by pro-Palestinian groups that took it to the streets. We expect every country around the world to take effective actions in the fight against anti-Semitism, uphold their responsibility

to protect Jews and Jewish communities and hold perpetrators accountable.

The devastating effects of emboldening Hamas and not holding it accountable will also have a lasting calamitous effect on the people of Gaza. When Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it purposely left behind greenhouses and other structures that could have enabled the Palestinian population there to thrive. Israel and the international community were ready to help Gaza flourish, but Hamas had other plans. Since seizing control of the territory in 2007, after an internal battle in which it executed members of the rival Palestinian group, Fatah, Hamas has created a tyrannical regime and turned Gaza into a terror hub. Instead of using international aid or essential materials to build homes, offices or factories, it created a network of subterranean terror tunnels. It placed its headquarters in a multistorey residential building and stored its missile and rockets inside schools.

A strong Hamas means more suffering for the people of Gaza. It is crucial that the aid provided not be used to strengthen Hamas in any way.

Finally, as we look towards the future, it is crucial to understand that not holding Hamas accountable and allowing it to grow its political power and influence are detrimental to any sort of dialogue. Israel will always work to advance peace. The Abraham Accords served as a clear example of Israel's peaceful intentions.

However, Hamas continues to be an obstacle to peace. Hamas rejects the Quartet principles. It refuses to accept Israel's right to exist. It refuses to renounce violence or to acknowledge past agreements.

There should be no mistake: if the international community strengthens Hamas, it will make the possibility of Hamas replacing the Palestinian Authority much more likely and eliminate the chance of future dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. There is nothing to discuss with a terror organization committed to one's annihilation. As President Biden said, there cannot be peace in the region until Israel is recognized by all as an independent Jewish State. Hamas has made it clear that it will never do so.

The week-old ceasefire should be used as an opportunity to prevent Hamas from continuing to terrorize the people of Israel or the people of Gaza. The Security Council and the entire international community must join Israel in preventing Hamas from

growing both militarily and politically. This is the only way to prevent another round of violence, and it is the only way to keep the chances for dialogue and a brighter future alive.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of Note 507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his thorough briefing and for all the work that his team has done to support the ceasefire efforts and to bring some calm to the situation in the past two weeks.

I also thank Mr. Lazzarini for his update and for the life-saving work that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has undertaken in very challenging circumstances. I thank Mr. Khalidi for taking the time to share his opinions with the Security Council today. I thank the representatives of Israel and the Observer State of Palestine for joining us.

I also want to start by thanking the Government of Egypt for working with us to achieve this ceasefire as well as the Governments of Jordan and Qatar and other partners that contributed through their good offices. Quiet, intensive, relentless diplomacy at the highest levels has brought a temporary end to the violence, and the United States is determined to continue that diplomacy to ensure that the calm holds. That is why President Biden sent Secretary Blinken to the region — to build on this ceasefire, to thank our partners and to foster stability and security.

That starts by recognizing the tremendous human toll of the violence. Casualties are often reduced to numbers, but behind every number is a real person: a daughter, a son, a father, a mother, a grandparent, a friend, a human being. And beyond those killed are those who were wounded, be it physically or psychologically. For them we need to find a solution. Thoughts are not enough. We are committed to helping

the recovery process. The humanitarian need is great, and this is the moment to step up and meet it.

Building on our March and April announcements of \$250 million in United States assistance to the Palestinians, Secretary Blinken recently announced more than \$38 million in new assistance to support humanitarian efforts in the West Bank and Gaza. That includes nearly \$33 million to UNRWA in support of its West Bank and Gaza emergency operations and an additional \$5.5 million in humanitarian assistance provided through the United States Agency for International Development.

That life-saving aid will support humanitarian partners, which will use it to provide food, health care, relief items and emergency shelter to those displaced by the recent conflict. It will also provide mental health and psychosocial support for those who have experienced trauma. We will work closely with the United Nations, the Palestinian Authority and the other partners and will not — I repeat not — direct any assistance to Hamas.

In addition, Secretary Blinken noted our intention to work with Congress to provide \$75 million more in development and economic assistance in the West Bank and Gaza over the next year. Our aid will go far, but the needs, especially in Gaza, are vast. We call on the rest of the Council, as well as the international community, to support those efforts and provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.

As in every humanitarian emergency, funding and access are needed in equal measure. Specifically, an effective humanitarian response requires the continued opening of the Erez and Kerem Shalom border crossings, the fast-track processing of humanitarian convoys and the unimpeded movement of relief and recovery supplies into Gaza. Let us work together to protect those conditions and help those in need. In addition, we need to promote progress and economic stability in both the West Bank and Gaza. We need to strengthen the private sector, and we need to expand trade and investment.

As President Biden has said, Palestinians and Israelis equally deserve to live safely and securely, to enjoy equal measures of freedom, opportunity and democracy and to be treated with dignity. As we work with the parties and others to address the urgent needs on the ground, let us therefore also start to think through how we can support better lives for both Palestinians

and Israelis and turn this fragile calm into something much more sustainable.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator, the Commissioner-General and Mr. Khalidi for their briefings.

Like the Security Council last weekend, France welcomed the announcement of the cessation of hostilities on 21 May and calls for its full respect. It was the result of collective efforts. France fully played its part in calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, coordinating closely with its Jordanian, Egyptian, United States and European partners, and being in contact with the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority. In that way, we contributed to the international pressure that brought about an end of the fighting on the night of 20 to 21 May.

France also ensured that the Security Council participated in those efforts by taking the initiative for a draft resolution. We welcome the fact that the Council was finally able to make a statement (SC/14527) following the truce. We again welcome the key role played by Egypt, the role of the United State, and the contribution of other countries of the region, in particular Jordan and Qatar.

The truce, which has so far been respected, must now be sustained through sustainable ceasefire arrangements. We will be very careful to ensure that no new rockets are fired against Israeli territory. I recall our very strong condemnation of the attacks carried out, particularly by Hamas. There has been a heavy human toll for the civilian population after 11 days of fighting. The number of displaced persons is extremely high and numerous homes and civilian infrastructure have been destroyed or damaged.

The truce must therefore enable the most urgent humanitarian needs to be met, particularly in Gaza. France calls for unhindered humanitarian access. It welcomes the first steps taken in that direction with the opening of crossing points for humanitarian aid and personnel. It intends to allocate several million euros, in addition to its annual aid, so as to meet the most pressing needs. We call on all Member States to also contribute.

In Gaza, beyond the emergency response, a more extensive reconstruction programme will be required, especially for critical civilian infrastructure, as well as in the medical field, including to address the

coronavirus disease. We are ready to fully play our part in those efforts, in conjunction with the United Nations, by ensuring that aid reaches only those for whom it is intended.

The truce must ultimately be accompanied by an easing of tensions throughout the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. We remain very concerned by the threats of eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, which we call on the Israeli authorities not to implement, and recall our strong opposition to settlement in all its forms. We also call for full respect for the 1967 status quo regarding the holy sites. In addition to that, all provocations and all incitement to hatred and violence must stop.

Those 11 days of serious violence remind us that we cannot remove the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If we choose to live with it or forget it, it will come back to us in new episodes of violence.

Without a political perspective and respect for international law, the same causes will produce the same effects. The cycles of violence will continue to follow one after the other and the civilian population will once again be the main victims.

France reiterates its resolute support for a two-State solution, living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 1967 lines, both with Jerusalem as their capital, within the framework of international law and the resolutions of the Council. That is the only way to meet the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and to ensure the security of all.

France is determined to fully play its part in maintaining that prospect, in conjunction with all its international partners. The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, will continue his efforts in the context of the Amman format, with his German, Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts. Together, we remain determined to work step by step to restore confidence between the parties with a view to resuming negotiations.

The Security Council has been mobilized throughout this crisis. It must now engage in supporting the efforts to relaunch the political process.

**Mr. Kimani** (Kenya): Given the latest developments, the expanded list of briefers is welcome, and I thank them for their perspectives.

As the past couple of weeks unfolded, we were reminded once again that the resolution of the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine, however remote it may seem, would require new thinking and a fresh impetus. Every cycle of conflict puts all international agreements and mechanisms into question. Even when tensions are low, the Council's monthly reports and briefings remind us that what is in place has offered little prospect of a resolution. We urge both parties— Israelis and Palestinians — to give the resolution of the conflict the appropriate level of urgency it requires and to re-engage on the normalization of relations and direct negotiations.

Kenya welcomes the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire on 21 May. We also recognize that in order for the ceasefire to hold, numerous other bilateral and regional de-escalation and mediation efforts continue to be pursued. We also recognize the committed efforts of Tunisia, Norway, China and France to the 22 May press statement of the Security Council on the Gaza ceasefire (SC/14527). We commend all those efforts, including the continued engagement of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, alongside the work of Secretary-General António Guterres and the Special Envoys of the Middle East Quartet. The Security Council, as the only United Nations body with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, will need to ensure that the ceasefire is not only sustained but that there is also a cessation of hostilities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Kenya has consistently supported diplomatic negotiations, conducted in an environment of peace, to achieve a two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine live within secure and recognized borders, in line with the June 1967 borders. All regional and international efforts should be underlined by multilateralism and guided by the agreed international mechanisms, including resolution 2334 (2016).

The human toll, injuries, thousands of displacements, the demolition of homes and critical infrastructure, the psychological effects and other forms of harm — all within an extremely fragile Palestine and amid a global pandemic — will require the identification of immediate steps for prevention and recovery, not only in Gaza, but also in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and the West Bank. The field visit and the 23 May statement made by the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations

Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ms. Lynn Hastings, reveal that the impact on the economy, health and food security on the ground will require multisectoral and inter-agency coordination.

Kenya welcomes the launch of the humanitarian appeal towards reconstruction efforts and the provision of basic goods and services, including water, fuel and medicine. As humanitarian and reconstruction work is undertaken, Kenya believes that efforts to monitor and prevent their exploitation by militants should be taken. We cannot allow the Palestinian people to suffer from the use of their civilian objects for hiding weapons and launching attacks, thereby inviting retaliatory strikes against extremists, which then lead to further suffering among the Palestinian people.

We support the continued role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as key in reinforcing humanitarian efforts. We encourage the re-opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing and full access for humanitarian deliveries.

As much as humanitarian aid is needed and useful, funding appeals following cycles of conflict have proved not to be a sustainable approach. As I stated at the beginning, we need to rethink how to avoid the next cycle of conflict and address the underlying causes of hostilities. Humanitarian efforts will require integration, with the establishment of sustainable building blocks and institutions. The time is ripe for the international community to prevent and not wait for the next flare up. Perhaps it is also time to start speaking of peacebuilding and sustainable development within the conflict continuum.

The Council needs to revisit the political file and reinvigorate its efforts, in partnership with regional and neighbouring States, towards direct negotiations and the resolution of the final status issues as a pathway for a permanent and secure peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Kenya continues to raise the alarm with regard to how hostilities, such as those we witnessed in those 11 days, can have a spillover effect and fan extremism and even hatred globally. We observed how quickly terrorist groups and their backers jumped on the opportunity to renew their message of radicalization and recruitment the world over. No cause can excuse Hamas's rocket launches against civilian targets in Israel, the exploitation of civilian infrastructure, use

of human shields or hiding weaponry inside civilian objects. Kenya reaffirms its strong condemnation of such acts, especially given the collateral damage it has caused to already vulnerable populations and innocent civilians, particularly children.

As we focus on the political solution to this protracted conflict, let us also put in place preventive and mitigating measures to address the issue of multigenerational radicalization and extremism, especially given the increasing sophistication of weaponry and operational strategies currently being employed by those groups.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): I would like to thank the briefers — Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Professor Khalidi — for their valuable contributions.

It is now almost one week ago that a ceasefire agreement was reached between Israel and Hamas, following the efforts of Egypt, Qatar, the United Nations, the United States and other regional and international actors. During 11 days of fighting, we saw thousands of rockets being fired by Hamas and other militant groups from Gaza into Israel, as well as the heavy Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

Norway continues to condemn all attacks against civilians. As the Special Coordinator has elaborated, the civilian casualties have been significant, and children have been especially affected. It is now imperative that the ceasefire be fully implemented and respected by all parties. Furthermore, priority must be given to providing humanitarian aid to the civilian population of Gaza. We call for rapid, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to bring in food, health services and other humanitarian relief, including essentials, such as fuel and gas.

As announced last week, Norway will increase its humanitarian support in Palestine to a total of more than \$12 million in 2021. As a major donor to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), we will also contribute to CERF's \$4.5 million allocation for the humanitarian response in Gaza.

Although we have all been focused on achieving a swift end to the most recent conflict, we should not forget the underlying issues. This escalation did not occur in a vacuum. So long as the Israeli occupation continues and there is no political process towards a solution, similar bouts of conflict will continue to flare

up regularly. The clashes in East Jerusalem, including on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the Temple Mount, as well as possible evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, illustrate how the current situation is not sustainable. We continue to follow with great concern the tense situation in the West Bank.

The parties, as well as the international community, should take this opportunity to intensify efforts to restart negotiations towards the two-State solution. We recognize the Middle East Quartet's important role in that regard, as well as the role of countries in the region.

We must continue our efforts to strengthen the institutional foundation for the two-State solution. As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), Norway remains focused on the State-building agenda and on the efforts of donors and partners to strengthen the Palestinian economy and improve the fiscal situation for the Palestinian Authority. Since 2014, that agenda has also included the reconstruction of Gaza and improving life for its inhabitants. As the people of Gaza again face tremendous destruction and humanitarian needs, we must all base our response on the fact that the Gaza strip will remain an integral part of Palestine. Our efforts to address the enormous needs of Gaza should be guided by our goal of contributing to the building of Palestine, and our efforts must help ensure calm and security for all civilians.

The AHLC remains the best-suited mechanism for coordinating assistance to Gaza. It brings together the parties, donors and development partners. It brings a holistic view of Palestine's development and governance needs, with the Palestinian Authority at the centre.

Norway will convene working meetings at the expert level to align priorities and make recommendations as soon as the United Nations and the World Bank can present their assessment of damage and needs. We will assess how structures and mechanisms already financed and in operation, such as the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, can be continued and the necessary amendments made. We also reconfirm our intention to convene an AHLC meeting at the ministerial level in late September or early October in collaboration with the co-sponsors, the European Union, the United States, as well as regional and other partners.

I will conclude with a few words about the Security Council's role. We are pleased that the Council was

able to agree, on 22 May, a press statement to welcome the ceasefire and call for humanitarian assistance (SC/14527). It is crucial that the Council speak with one voice on issues such as those. The Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. And people on the ground listen to what the Council says — and what it does not say. The Council therefore bears a heavy responsibility to live up to its mandate and the expectations of people affected by conflict. Norway will continue its efforts to contribute to Council action and to finding solutions.

**Mr. Dang** (Viet Nam): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini for their informative and insightful briefings. I also thank Professor Rashid Khalidi for sharing his perspective on the issue.

I welcome the representatives of Palestine and Israel to our meeting today.

Viet Nam once again welcomes the ceasefire announced between the parties, after 11 days of violence, which killed over 200 people and wounded thousands from both sides, the vast majority of them Palestinians. We highly commend the constructive efforts by Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and other regional countries, the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet and other international partners in that regard.

We would like to emphasize that the ceasefire remains very fragile, as the situation on the ground continues to be volatile. We urge all parties to fully adhere to the ceasefire and make it permanent. In order to do that, restraint on the part of all parties is of paramount importance. We continue to call upon all parties to refrain from any actions or rhetoric that can ignite a new cycle of violence. Lessons from decades of conflict tell us that any lack of restraint, whether by an individual or a group, can risk triggering subsequent actions that drag both sides into a spiral of escalation. That has happened, and it will likely continue to happen.

Favourable conditions for the implementation of the ceasefire are crucial. We once again commend the ongoing efforts by relevant countries and organizations to restore calm and ensure full adherence by all parties to the ceasefire. We encourage mediation efforts to maintain stability and avoid the risk of further escalation.

A permanent ceasefire also requires concrete steps to deal with the causes of the conflict. We urge Israeli authorities to halt all settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and stop the demolition of Palestinian homes and the eviction of Palestinian people. All measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and run counter to United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

We once again reaffirm our strong belief that the only way forward is a two-State solution, including the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital that peacefully coexists alongside the State of Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis the pre-1967 lines, and a negotiated settlement in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions.

We call on the parties concerned to take steps towards resuming negotiations with a strong vision to find a just, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Palestine question. To that end, the role of the international community, including regional countries, the United Nations, the Quartet and other international partners, is essential.

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize the urgency of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. Besides human casualties, the violence destroyed or damaged a wide range of vital civilian structures, including water and power infrastructure and health-care and educational facilities. The situation is all the more worrisome in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic in the Gaza Strip. In that connection, we would like to underscore the importance of unimpeded humanitarian access to all the people in need. The reconstruction of Gaza will take years and require a large amount of financial support. The priority now should be to rebuild infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. We appreciate the tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other international organizations in providing relief to the Palestinians in Gaza during and after the conflict, and we continue to call on the international community to increase support for humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Gaza, including those undertaken by UNRWA.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, for their briefings on the situation in the Palestinian territories. We also listened carefully to Professor Khalidi.

I would like to welcome Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Permanent Representative of the United States, to today's meeting. For her, this is the first in-person meeting in the Security Council Chamber. She is not in the Chamber now, but I think Rodney Hunter will transmit our welcome, which I think we all share.

Today's discussion of the situation in the Middle East is taking place against the backdrop of the tragic events that claimed the lives of 230 Palestinians, including 66 children, as well as 12 Israelis. We express our condolences to the families of the victims and the injured. The population of the Gaza Strip is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including through the reconstruction of infrastructure. UNRWA, whose work we support, can play a key role in that regard. We hope that the Agency's funding in the current challenging conditions will be stable.

We were relieved and glad to learn that a ceasefire was established in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone. For our part, we worked vigorously from the outset to bring an end to the hostilities and intensively engaged with key regional partners. We actively used the communication channels established within the Quartet. We thank all those who took part in that process, and we note in particular the mediation of the leadership of Egypt and Qatar. The United Nations and Special Coordinator Wennesland also made an important contribution to calming the situation.

There is no fighting in Palestine or in Israel today. However, that does not mean that we can put off resolving the Palestinian question to a later date. Unfortunately, history has proven time and time again that this is the key issue for the entire Middle East and the world as a whole. And that is not just a figure of speech or an overstatement. We all saw how sensitive was the reaction of the Muslim Ummah to the events in East Jerusalem around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

It is obvious that there will be no final peace status in the Middle East until all issues are resolved. To prevent a relapse into armed confrontation, it is

necessary to focus international and regional efforts on creating conditions for restarting direct talks between Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of United Nations resolutions and the principle of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side-by-side in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

One factor that would help create such conditions is the rejection of unilateral steps, including settlement activity and provocations that repeatedly antagonize the parties. Israel's security concerns must be addressed. It is important to work to restore Palestinian unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform. The status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem must be respected, and here we know that the Jordanian monarchy plays a special role.

Active discussions on the Palestinian question over the past two weeks in the Security Council as well as in the General Assembly have shown that the international community as a whole is unanimous in its understanding of the ultimate goal of a settlement, as well as its legal framework. It is important to preserve this unity, including among the members of the Security Council. The support expressed for these parameters must be translated into concrete actions.

We do not believe that the whole set of problems can be solved by any one actor alone. To do so will require working together through collective efforts. In that regard, we once again invite our colleagues, including those in the Quartet, to consider our proposals to hold a ministerial meeting of the Quartet, as well as one in an expanded format, with the participation of regional States and the Palestinians and Israelis themselves. We are ready to study proposals and views in that regard, and the sooner we begin our collective work, the sooner the situation in the region will become stable.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Professor Khalidi for their briefings today.

The United Kingdom joins others in strongly welcoming the ceasefire. We reiterate our thanks to the United Nations, Egypt, Qatar and other regional actors for their mediation. My Prime Minister has conveyed my country's deepest condolences to the families of the civilians killed, particularly those who lost children. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the cycle of violence has taken too many lives.

We now need to focus on making the ceasefire durable. My Foreign Secretary travelled to the region yesterday and met Israeli and Palestinian leaders. As he made clear, the latest escalation underlines the urgent need to make progress towards a more positive future and to address the drivers of conflict.

The United Kingdom has been clear that violence against peaceful worshipers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque was unacceptable. Maintaining the historic status quo and the safety and sanctity of the holy sites is crucial. We support the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's important role as Custodian.

We have all been deeply disturbed by the scenes of violence in Sheikh Jarrah. The United Kingdom has been clear that settlement activity is illegal under international law and damages prospects for peace; and that the Government of Israel must end its settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem and elsewhere on the West Bank. Events at the holy sites and in Sheikh Jarrah do not justify the indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas and other militant groups. We condemn those attacks in absolute terms. We continue to call on those groups to permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. We have been clear that Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence in responding to attacks. In exercising that right, it is vital that all actions be in line with international humanitarian law and make every effort to avoid civilian casualties.

We are gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including damage and destruction of key civilian infrastructure. Rapid and unhindered access into Gaza for humanitarian actors and essential supplies remains critical. We urge the continued opening of all crossings in and out of Gaza, including for life-saving medical treatment.

The United Kingdom has provided an initial \$4.5 million in aid to the emergency flash appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to help address immediate humanitarian needs. We commend UNRWA for its continued efforts and its support to Gazans displaced during the conflict.

Economic growth in the occupied Palestinian territories remains vital to give hope to the Palestinian people. For too long, it has been stifled. We call on the Palestinian Authority and Israel to resume dialogue on economic issues, to reconvene the Joint

Economic Committee and to address the financial and coronavirus-disease crises together.

We applaud the efforts of all who have engaged the parties since the ceasefire to try to find a political way forward. We welcome calls for equality of safety, security, freedom, peace and dignity for Palestinians and Israelis.

In conclusion, a longer-term political horizon is essential. Recent events must galvanize us all in our commitment to achieving a two-State solution that ensures a safe and secure Israel living alongside a Palestinian State based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem the shared capital of both States — the only solution that we believe can end the cycle of violence and deliver a just and sustainable peace.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland): I want to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for the briefing this morning and express special thanks, too, to Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Professor Khalidi for their truly valuable insights this morning.

Ireland welcomes the ceasefire agreed last weekend following 11 days of violent conflict. The job now is for all parties to respect and maintain the ceasefire to avoid the risk of further bloodshed. All of those with influence on the parties must continue to use that leverage to ensure that the ceasefire is maintained and built upon. Israeli and Palestinian leaders must work to reduce rhetoric and to reduce tension.

We welcome the fact that the Security Council was finally able to adopt a press statement (SC/14527) after the ceasefire was agreed. We have no cause, however, for self-congratulation. Our inability as a Council to utter a single agreed word as the conflict raged for 11 days marks a sobering failure of our collective diplomacy. As Professor Khalidi noted, recent events and the weakness of our response put into perspective the scale of the challenge in charting a political path towards sustainable peace in the Middle East. The Council must shoulder its responsibility. We must support the parties to meet that challenge and to help to end the cycle of violence and bloodshed.

In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, meeting humanitarian need is essential, in particular for the stricken population in the Gaza Strip.

Ireland has announced additional funding for both the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and

UNICEF in Gaza, and we urge all donors to increase their support at this critical moment, including through the inter-agency flash appeal launched today.

Ireland is very concerned that UNRWA buildings, among them hospitals and schools, were damaged during military operations in Gaza. The Agency plays a vital humanitarian role in Gaza and must be protected. Through Commissioner-General Lazzarini, I pay tribute to the dedicated staff of UNRWA and other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations that provided critical services and support throughout the crisis and continue to do so now.

We call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian relief. We call on Hamas to facilitate unhindered humanitarian access in the Gaza Strip.

Ireland supports an integrated approach to reconstruction. We renew our call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza. The Gaza Strip is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory. Reconstruction efforts must take that into account.

Israeli and Palestinian authorities must launch investigations, in line with international standards, into alleged violations of international humanitarian law during the conduct of hostilities. All parties, including Israel, Hamas and other militant groups, have a responsibility to respect international humanitarian law.

The recent crisis has taken a devastating toll, especially on Palestinians. Many innocent Palestinians and Israelis have needlessly lost their lives, and many more have seen their lives torn apart. These terrible events underscore the simple fact that the Palestinian question cannot be ignored or put on the back burner.

Ireland echoes the Secretary-General's call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to move beyond the restoration of calm and to promote serious dialogue to address the root causes of the conflict. We believe that it is critical that women be part of this process, and Ireland was pleased to facilitate a briefing just yesterday by women civil society leaders in Palestine to members of the Council.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, said last week (see S/2021/480), we must ask ourselves how we move past the recurring cycles of violence between Palestinians and Israelis. Terrorist attacks must stop. These attacks cannot and should not be justified. The flouting of international law, with the expansion of

illegal settlements into occupied Palestinian territory, must stop. Evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the West Bank must stop. The demolition of Palestinian property, settler violence, intimidation and incitement must stop.

We must acknowledge that these actions, occurring at an unacceptable rate for many years, are a source of legitimate grievance among the Palestinian people and undermine prospects for peace and reconciliation. The Council must require of Israelis and Palestinians that they live up to their commitments and comply with international law. Fundamental rights, in particular those of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, must be vindicated and respected equally.

We believe that the Council, acting in concert with the Quartet, key Arab States and other major stakeholders, should now urge the parties to make serious and sustained efforts towards credible negotiations. The establishment of a genuine political horizon towards a negotiated two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and the agreed parameters, is essential to the delivery of a peaceful future where equal rights and equal opportunities can be enjoyed by Palestinians and Israelis alike.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his important briefing and his valuable efforts to de-escalate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I would also like to thank Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Professor Khalidi for their briefings. We also express our great appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts to reach a ceasefire.

We commend the international community's efforts to de-escalate the situation and put an end to the aggression. Tunisia has intensely contributed to these efforts at the highest level through coordination with Council members. We also commend all international and regional actors for their contributions in that regard, especially the members of the Middle East Quartet, as well as Egypt, Qatar and Jordan.

Today's meeting is being held amid a cautious calm in the occupied Palestinian territories following the announcement of a ceasefire approximately one week ago. However, reports of continued provocations by groups of settlers and Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians in East Jerusalem are a source of concern

and could lead to a renewed outbreak with devastating consequences, not only in the occupied Palestinian territory, but in the region as a whole.

Given the delicate and sensitive situation, Tunisia calls once again calls the international community, particularly the Security Council, to uphold its responsibility and pressure the occupying Power to abide by its obligations pursuant to international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to cease its violations, plans of expansion and settler activity, as well as unilateral actions that would only lead to violence and destruction and would undermine the prospects for achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Tunisia also reiterates its call on the international community to guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians and to end the unjust blockade of Gaza Strip and all forms of collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

The horrifying acts of repression and intimidation committed by the occupying Power against the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and its shameless aggression against the Gaza Strip have resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, including to many women and children, and have caused widespread destruction of the infrastructure. Tunisia calls on regional and international actors to step up their assistance and humanitarian response in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, in order to contribute to reconstruction efforts. We also reiterate the need to respond to UNRWA's appeals to support its emergency relief interventions and enable it to continue to provide services to more than 5.5 million Palestine refugees. In that context, Tunisia commends the exceptional efforts that the United Nations, international humanitarian actors and non-governmental humanitarian organizations have been making in the occupied Palestinian territories. We also applaud the generous support of donors to advance those efforts.

The victims and the long-term psychosocial and humanitarian impact of the aggression, the destroyed infrastructure and the immense economic losses resulting from the siege and coronavirus disease pandemic all add to the suffering of the Palestinian people, who have been subjected to ongoing repression and abuse by the occupying Power for decades with impunity.

After more than seven decades of occupation, killing, destruction and displacement, is it not time to achieve justice, restore Palestinian rights and impose respect for resolutions of international legitimacy in order to end this unjust occupation and establish a sovereign independent Palestinian State? Until when will authorities of the occupying Power continue to challenge the international community and ignore international law and resolutions of international legitimacy? When will Palestine become a full-fledged State Member of the United Nations?

We reiterate that we stand before a historic responsibility today. We must champion right and justice and be partial to international legitimacy for the sake of achieving international peace and security and restoring stability in the region so as to prevent cycles of violence, such as those we have witnessed recently, from repeating themselves, killing civilians and dashing the hope of achieving peace.

Accordingly, we renew the call for unified international action through coordination between the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Middle East Quartet and parties of the region, in order to create the conditions necessary to ensuring active and binding engagements of the relevant parties to practically relaunch serious and credible negotiations within a specific time frame. This is the path to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, on the basis of international law, resolutions of international legitimacy, the agreed parameters of a settlement and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, Tunisia will pursue its efforts inside the Security Council and in other regional and international forums, through cooperation and coordination with sisterly and friendly States, to achieve those ends. We will remain firm in our principled support for the struggle of the fraternal Palestinian people, in order to end the occupation, restore their legitimate rights that are not subject to statute of limitations and establish their sovereign, independent State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and with the settlement of all other final status issues.

**Mr. Tirumurti (India):** I thank Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and Mr. Rashid Khalidi for their briefings.

The situation in East Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories has been the focus of the Security Council in the last two weeks. During these Council meetings, India expressed her deep concern over violence in the old city of Jerusalem, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, and over the possible evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem, an area which is part of an arrangement facilitated by the United Nations. We also underlined the need to respect the historic status quo in Jerusalem.

We welcome the announcement of the ceasefire and recognize the important role of the international community, members of the Middle East Quartet, and countries of the region, in facilitating the ceasefire and in continuing their efforts towards peacebuilding. The ceasefire has arrested the sharp deterioration of the security situation and restored relative calm. However, the situation continues to be fragile. We reiterate our call for all parties to observe maximum restraint and avoid acts of violence, provocation, incitement and destruction.

The latest cycle of violence has resulted in loss of precious human lives, including that of an Indian national. We extend our deep condolences to all the affected families. The immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in Gaza, and ensuring the smooth flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza through verified channels are matters of importance.

For our part, India continues to provide developmental and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian Authority both bilaterally and through contributions to United Nations-led mechanisms. India has always supported UNRWA's strong role in human development and humanitarian services.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction will now form an important aspect of the international community's efforts in Gaza, and these must be prioritized. The Palestinian Authority should continue to be the fulcrum for such assistance to ensure the well-being and interests of all Palestinians.

Even as we focus on the immediate situation, we must underline the need for resuming dialogue between Israel and Palestine for a two-State solution. The absence of direct and meaningful negotiations between

the two parties has only widened the trust deficit, which, in turn, increases the chances for similar escalations in future. As the rehabilitation efforts continue, it is important for the international community and the Middle East Quartet, in particular, to exert all efforts to resume these direct negotiations.

We firmly believe that only a two-State solution achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations between both sides on final status issues will deliver an enduring peace that the peoples of Israel and Palestine desire and deserve.

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Mr. Khalidi for their timely briefings. I also welcome the representatives of Palestine and Israel to the Security Council.

Like other members of the Council, Mexico welcomes the announcement of the ceasefire that came into effect last Friday. We also welcome the mediation efforts of Egypt, Qatar and others, which were all important in achieving that goal. Unfortunately, after 11 days of conflict, the toll, as we have heard repeatedly, is grave: nearly 300 fatalities, 9,000 wounded, 77,000 displaced and millions of dollars in material damage. And yet, despite this, we note that the fighting in Jerusalem continues unabated, a sign of the fragility of the agreement that has been reached. This cycle of violence is added to the list of clashes that have been occurring between Israel and Palestine for the past 13 years.

In that context, reconstruction plans and funds from international donors spurred by temporary truces naturally help, but to some extent they fall on deaf ears. As long as the historical and underlying causes of the conflict are not addressed, we will continue to deplore episodes of confrontation followed by temporary truces and reconstruction processes.

There is no reason for Israeli children to have to run to a bunker in the middle of the night or for Palestinian children to have to seek temporary refuge in schools. The only way to break this vicious cycle and offer a prosperous and peaceful future for Israeli and Palestinian children is through the full implementation of the two-State solution based on United Nations resolutions and well-known international parameters — a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and supports the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State.

While reaffirming its commitment to the two-State solution, Mexico urges the Palestinian leadership to set a new date and plan for its electoral process. The holding of free and transparent elections is the backbone of any democratic State. We also urge Hamas and other organizations in Gaza to refrain from firing rockets or incendiary devices or from engaging in any other attack against Israel.

We also call on Israel to promote conditions conducive to peaceful and prosperous Palestinian economic development and, among other measures, to lift the blockade on Gaza. Similarly, we urge it to end all settlement activity in the occupied territories, including the appropriation, eviction and demolition of Palestinian properties, as well as the construction and expansion of settlements, which are illegal under international law and represent an obstacle to the two-State solution. Likewise, and in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, we call for the preservation of the special status of Jerusalem.

We reiterate our call on political, social and religious leaders to refrain from the use of inflammatory rhetoric that fosters social polarization and fuels violence.

My delegation welcomes the prompt allocation by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and some international partners of funds to begin reconstruction work in Gaza. We hope that the contributions of the international community will continue.

In conclusion, reconstruction and economic reactivation efforts in Palestine must go hand in hand with the realization of the legitimate aspirations of self-determination of the Palestinian people. An independent and economically viable Palestinian State will benefit Israel's security. The responsibility to resume this process undoubtedly rests with the parties in conflict. However, all of us in the international community have an obligation to support this process.

**Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Professor Khalidi for their briefings.

We followed with deep concern the latest round of escalation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and the loss of civilian lives resulting from the violence, especially among children. We strongly condemned the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas and other

militant groups, while stressing the need for the parties to abide by international humanitarian law.

Estonia welcomes the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. It is vital that the parties respect and fully observe the ceasefire and do their utmost to avoid further tensions and violence. We commend the important role the United Nations, the United States, Egypt, Qatar and other international partners played in that regard.

The ceasefire creates space to address urgent humanitarian needs. We support the Secretary-General's call for a robust package of support for reconstruction and recovery in Gaza. Estonia is planning additional funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to address the tremendous humanitarian consequences of the recent conflict.

Considering the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, it is vital to grant unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all those in need and to work for sustainable reconstruction and recovery.

It is also important to calm the volatile situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including around the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. All acts of provocation, incitement, violence and destruction must end. The status quo of the holy sites must be respected. We also call on Israel to halt the continued settlement expansion, evictions and demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem, as they are contrary to international law.

We call on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions that would further increase tensions and undermine the viability of the two-State solution.

The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be achieved only through meaningful negotiations. We call upon the international community, including the Middle East Quartet, to create conditions for resuming direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the aim of achieving a two-State solution, based on international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

**Mr. Abarry** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, whose agency is doing outstanding work in occupied Palestine, and Mr. Rashid Khalidi for their briefings.

I welcome the presence here of the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

I would also like to thank the Chinese presidency for the dynamism and effectiveness it has shown throughout this month in the organization of our various meetings on the situation in the Middle East, including today's, which has given us the opportunity to meet in person.

The Niger has followed with great interest the latest developments in the region, in particular the ceasefire reached on 21 May between the Israelis and the Palestinians, putting an end to one of the most deadly escalations of violence of recent years.

While the guns fell silent almost a week ago, the security situation on the ground remains precarious. The upsurge in incidents between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces, provocative speech and incitement to hatred, as well as the tensions observed in the West Bank, must demand the greatest vigilance on our part in order to prevent backsliding and guarantee overall respect for the ceasefire. In that regard, we welcome the visit to the region by United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken with a view to consolidating the hard-won truce between the parties.

We call on the parties to exercise the utmost restraint in refraining from taking any action that could jeopardize the ceasefire, as well as the calming and rebuilding of trust between them. That is an essential step for the resumption of the peace talks.

The cessation of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians and the return to calm, which we welcome today, remain the fruits of intense diplomatic efforts, both regionally and internationally. That all once again demonstrates the effectiveness of collective engagement in resolving conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Egypt, Qatar, the United States, the United Nations and all the other actors in the great efforts to bring about a ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians.

The events of the past few weeks, like the other bloody episodes that have marked the tumultuous history of Israeli-Palestinian relations, teach us that the support of the international community is crucial in bringing the parties to engage in dialogue. We therefore call on the international community, the Quartet, the members of the Council and the regional actors that have influence on the parties to continue

to put the necessary pressure in order to relaunch the peace process, which has stalled for several years. The achievement of the two-State solution, the only solution to the conflict, to which we had reiterated our strong commitment over the past weeks, must now not be paralysed in any way. It must be set as a priority to permit these two peoples, who, for so long, have been subjected to violence and misunderstandings, to enjoy peaceful coexistence. However, if that is to occur, the underlying cause of the issue must be resolved — that is, ending Israel's unrestrained settlement policy in the Palestinian territories, as expressly called for in resolution 2334 (2016).

Furthermore, the continued settlement activity and injustice against the Palestinian people serve as a breeding ground for discontent and rebellion, which, in turn, leads to radicalization and violence. For Palestinians who have been bullied and martyred, the future must cease being perpetually bleak. Just as the African National Congress of South Africa fought against the contemptible system of apartheid, Palestinians have the right to fight for their freedoms, their territory and, quite simply, their human dignity in the face of oppression and colonialism.

My delegation deplores the considerable loss of life caused by the recent escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. While the loss of human life, including of women, children and even infants, is deeply regrettable, the death of defenceless Palestinian civilians under occupation is unacceptable. Bombing by the Israelis has left Gaza in a critical humanitarian situation. Long before current tensions erupted, the Gaza Strip — a veritable open-air prison — languished under the weight of an illegal blockade that has lasted 15 years. Nearly 43 per cent of its population is unemployed and its population density is approximately 5,500 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its health system is on the verge of collapse as it grapples with a soaring coronavirus disease (COVID-19) transmission rate.

This already tragic situation is compounded by the total or partial destruction of the remaining civilian infrastructure, on which the people of Gaza depended. The infrastructure affected includes schools and health facilities, including the central COVID-19 testing laboratories, as well as power lines, the drinking water supply system and commercial and residential buildings. Despite the end of the fighting, the mix of all those elements explains the numerous humanitarian challenges that require urgent measures that would

enable Gaza to recover and its population to have a semblance of normal life.

We launch an urgent call for greater international generosity towards the long-suffering people of Gaza. The reconstruction and recovery of Gaza cannot be delayed, as thousands of innocent lives depend on it. The success of efforts towards a lasting easing of tensions also depend on it. We welcome the delivery of humanitarian convoys to Gaza, including from Egypt, and the financial aid already announced by some countries. To emerge from this particularly worrisome situation, Israel, the occupying Power, must take urgent and effective measures, under international humanitarian law, to ensure the well-being and survival of the population under its control.

The Niger welcomes the tireless efforts of Mr. Tor Wennesland and reaffirms its full commitment to supporting all efforts of the international community towards a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and mediation efforts. I also thank the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Lazzarini, for his briefing. We have taken note of his four recommendations. We greatly appreciate the enlightened perspective of Mr. Khalidi of Columbia University. We also thank the representatives of the State of Palestine and the State of Israel for their statements. All briefings were essentially about loss and despair and an urgent call for new thinking and a changed approach.

The briefings come at a particularly acute time for the consideration of the situation in the Middle East, especially in Gaza, where oppression and settler colonialism continue. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines follows with great concern and consternation the spike in violence in Gaza since 10 May, leading to more than 250 deaths; more than 1,900 wounded, the majority of whom are civilians, including women, children and the elderly; and more than 75,000 displaced persons. That has all been compounded by the destruction of civilian infrastructure — houses, schools and hospitals.

As we mourn the loss of life among Palestinians and Israelis alike, we welcome the announcement of an unconditional ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, brokered under Egyptian auspices. We also commend

the countries of the region, including Qatar, the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet and others for their mediation efforts. It is our hope that the parties will exercise maximum restraint and ensure that the ceasefire represents a full and complete end to the violence.

Moreover, we welcome the Council's adoption last week of press statement SC/14527 on the ceasefire. That outcome reflects the extent of the Council's determination to alleviate the human suffering in Gaza despite the political obstacles that have hampered the Council's ability to act decisively to prevent the crisis.

We condemn the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which resulted in the wounding of dozens of worshippers and the arrest of six Palestinians. We repeat the call for the status quo at holy sites to be upheld and respected. Israeli aggression, in particular the attacks and storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by extremist settlers, must end immediately.

Our absolute priority today is to restore calm and immediately halt the suffering of Palestinian civilians on the ground, particularly in Gaza. The international community must take a closer look at the far-reaching human suffering and dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. In that connection, we call for the opening of all crossings into Gaza and urge the international community to provide rapid humanitarian aid and respond to the UNRWA flash appeal for \$38 million to address the most pressing humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza. We must do all we can to alleviate their suffering. Furthermore, the 14-year blockade draining life from Gaza must be lifted as an imperative.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the two-State solution remains the only way to achieve lasting peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. The international community needs to find a way to help the Israelis and the Palestinians return to negotiations on the two-State solution. The absence of a political dialogue runs the serious risk of further deterioration in security conditions in the future.

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

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland, Commissioner-General Lazzarini and Mr. Khalidi for their briefings.

Over the past month, Palestinian-Israeli tensions have tugged at the heartstrings of the entire world. The

Security Council held several emergency deliberations on the matter and issued a press statement (SC/14527) last week, in which Council members welcomed and called for full adherence to the ceasefire, mourned the loss of civilian lives resulting from the violence and reiterated their support for comprehensive peace, based on the two-State solution. We hope the message from the Council, as it speaks with one voice, will lead to a de-escalation of the situation and a resumption of the peace process. China commends the mediation and good offices by Egypt, Qatar and others. We are particularly grateful for the tireless efforts of Special Coordinator Wennesland.

Nonetheless, we must be cognizant of the persistent fragilities on the ground and the need for the international community to step up efforts to ensure that the parties concerned respect the ceasefire in good faith, in the interest of restoring full calm as soon as possible.

The renewed confrontations last weekend within and outside the Al-Aqsa Mosque point to continued tensions in East Jerusalem. We once again urge all the parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from any moves that might escalate the situation.

Israel must genuinely put an end to violence, threats and acts of provocation against the Muslim community, maintain and respect the historical and current status of Jerusalem as a religious holy site, cease evicting Palestinians and halt all settlement activity.

The humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories is a matter of concern. Years of blockade in Gaza, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and, now, more than 10 days of clashes and turmoil have conspired to plunge the over 2 million residents of Gaza into dire straits. We call on the international community to act without delay and provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine through multiple channels, as well as emergency funding support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We call on Israel to facilitate humanitarian access and completely lift the blockade on Gaza as soon as possible.

China will send \$1 million in cash to Palestine as emergency humanitarian aid, make a \$1 million donation to UNRWA and provide 200,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, we will continue to do whatever we can to help the Palestinian people in ways that address their practical needs.

The Palestinian-Israeli issue has been on the agenda of the United Nations for more than 70 years. Every time the Palestinian-Israeli situation is thrown into turmoil, it is an alarm bell for the international rule of law and justice, weighs on the human conscience and tests the effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms. The latest round of conflict once again reminds us that we cannot afford to allow the Middle East peace process to go off the rails, or to push the question of Palestine to the margins, or to overlook the suffering of the Palestinian people and their well-deserved rights, or to forget the many binding resolutions adopted by the Security Council or to shirk the responsibility the Council must undertake.

While addressing the emergency meeting of the Security Council on 16 May (see S/2021/480), His Excellency Mr. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, pointed out that an enduring settlement can be achieved only on the basis of the two-State solution. Only once the question of Palestine is resolved in a comprehensive, just and sustainable way will lasting peace and security for all be truly achieved in the Middle East.

We must push the two parties to relaunch dialogue on an equal footing at an early date, rebuild trust, overcome their differences and find a way to live in peace side by side. The international community, and especially countries with influence on Palestine and Israel, must take an objective and impartial position and work hard to facilitate the Middle East peace process, while enhancing international coordination and strengthening the synergy for peace.

The Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. As such, it must take robust actions to address the Palestinian-Israeli issue and reaffirm its unwavering commitment to and support for the two-State solution.

As a genuine friend of the Palestinian people, China supports the resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel on the basis of the two-State solution as soon as possible. China supports the early establishment of a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the ultimate solution that makes possible peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. We call on all parties in the international community to uphold equity, justice, fairness and good conscience, practice genuine multilateralism and make

their due contributions to a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of May, I would like to take this opportunity to express the sincere appreciation of the Chinese delegation to the members of the Council and to the Secretariat for all the strong support and assistance they have given us. It has been a busy month, and one in which we have taken active measures on the issues on the Security Council's agenda and the current serious challenges facing the international

community in an effort to bring into play the role of the Security Council, making unremitting efforts to maintain world peace and security. We would like to thank all delegations, representatives of the Secretariat, including the technical support team, conference officers, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security staff for their hard work, support and positive contributions. In particular in the context of the pandemic, their support was extended to us after overcoming many difficulties, which we can all imagine. Without their participation and contributions, we could not have done it alone.

As China ends its presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Estonia good luck in the month of June.

*The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.*