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Seventy-sixth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Auväärt	(Estonia)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France	Mr. De Rivièrè
	India	Mr. Swarup
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico	Mr. Ochoa Martínez
	Niger	Mr. Abarry
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Repkin
	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	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2021/584)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2021/584)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Wennesland is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/584, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the eighteenth report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2021/584). The written report members have already received covers the period between 23 March and 11 June.

Before turning to recent developments, I wish to reiterate that the cessation of hostilities reached last month between Israel and Hamas remains very fragile. The United Nations works closely with all concerned parties and partners, including Egypt, to solidify a ceasefire, allow the entry of urgent humanitarian assistance and stabilize the situation in Gaza. I urge all sides to refrain from unilateral steps and provocations, take steps to reduce tensions and allow those efforts to succeed. All sides must do their part to facilitate ongoing discussions to stabilize the situation on the ground and avoid another devastating escalation in Gaza.

I also wish to acknowledge the new Israeli coalition Government, which was sworn in on 13 June, under the leadership of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

Yair Lapid. I congratulate the members of the new Government and look forward to working with them to advance the two-State solution and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

I turn now to developments that have occurred since the submission of the written report.

In occupied East Jerusalem, 15 Palestinian households still face the imminent threat of eviction by the Israeli authorities from their homes in Shaykh Jarrah. The High Court has scheduled a hearing on 2 August to consider a leave to appeal request from some of the families. Separately, the Jerusalem District Court postponed until 8 July its decision on an appeal against an eviction order related to two residential buildings in the Batan Al-Hawa neighbourhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, violent incidents have continued on a daily basis throughout the occupied Palestinian territory since the submission of the written report. Clashes have repeatedly broken out in Beita village, near Nablus in the West Bank, in the context of protests against the construction of a new Israeli settlement outpost, Eviatar. Although a military order was issued on 9 June, designating the outpost a closed zone and ordering settlers to vacate, settler and significant Israeli security forces presence persisted, and Palestinian protests continued. On 11 June, Israeli security forces shot dead a 16-year-old Palestinian and on 17 June, another 16-year-old Palestinian succumbed to his wounds from shots sustained by Israeli security forces the previous night, after he reportedly threw an explosive device towards them. Since 3 May, five Palestinians have been killed and some 100 Palestinians have been injured by live ammunition in and around that area.

On 12 June, Israeli civilian security guards shot dead a Palestinian woman at the Qalandiya checkpoint near Jerusalem, after she reportedly ran towards them holding a knife. On 15 June, several thousand right-wing Israeli activists, including members of the Knesset, marched through Jerusalem's Old City, with many participants chanting racist slogans against Arabs and Muslims. The march, initially set for 10 May, was held amid a heavy Israeli police presence after having been rerouted by Israeli authorities from its planned trajectory throughout the Muslim quarter of the Old City. In protests and clashes that occurred in the context of the march, in East Jerusalem, as well as other parts of

the West Bank, 66 Palestinians, including 12 children, were injured by rubber bullets, sound grenades and physical assaults.

On the same day, rallies were organized throughout the Gaza strip by national and Islamic forces, protests erupted at the fence and militants in Gaza released incendiary balloons towards Israel, starting dozens of fires. In response to the incendiary balloons, from 16 to 17 June, Israeli Defense Forces targeted what they said were five Hamas facilities on the strip, causing damage but no injuries.

On 16 June, a Palestinian woman was shot dead by Israeli security forces at the Hizma checkpoint near Jerusalem after reportedly attempting to carry out a ramming and stabbing attack against Israeli soldiers. Between 19 and 23 June, confrontations continued between Israeli civilians and Palestinian residents in Shaykh Jarrah.

On 23 June, Palestinian activist and parliamentary candidate Nizar Banat was pronounced dead, hours after being arrested by Palestinian Security Forces at a house in Hebron. According to the victim's family, the Forces aggressively beat and physically assaulted the victim during the arrest.

I will turn now to several observations concerning the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period. I remain deeply troubled by continued Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I am concerned in particular about the approval of a plan to expand the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem. If implemented, the plan would further consolidate the continuum of illegal settlements separating East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and other Palestinian communities in the southern part of the West Bank. I am also concerned by the continued establishment of settlement outposts, which are also illegal under Israeli law. As we have seen, the recent establishment of Eviatar has already led to protests and clashes with tragic outcomes.

I again underscore, in no uncertain terms, that Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international law. They are a major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The advancement of all settlement activity must cease immediately.

The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, including humanitarian projects and schools, is also deeply concerning. I call on Israeli authorities to put an end to the demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement of Palestinians and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs.

The reporting period witnessed an alarming increase in the level of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, including hostilities between Israel and factions in Gaza at a scale and intensity not seen in years. I am especially concerned by the attempt to exploit the sensitive status of Jerusalem and to use it to justify a broader armed conflict. Those events have only deepened divisions between Israelis and Palestinians and are making progress towards peace an even greater challenge. The incitement and the violence must stop immediately.

The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and others is prohibited by international humanitarian law. Palestinian militants must cease that practice immediately. The Israeli authorities must also abide by the rules of international humanitarian law governing armed conflict and take all feasible precautions to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

I am appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. Children should be afforded special protection from violence. They should never be the target of violence or put in harm's way, nor should they be encouraged to commit or participate in acts of incitement or violence.

I am also deeply concerned by the increased intensity of settler-related violence and by violent attacks between Israeli and Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank. I urge Israel to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population in line with its responsibilities under international law. The perpetrators of violence on all sides must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

I also note with concern reports of armed civilians carrying out attacks against Palestinians in proximity to the Israeli security forces. I reiterate that the security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect lives. Israeli and Palestinian authorities must

carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

On too many occasions during the reporting period, officials exacerbated tensions and violence with unacceptable rhetoric and provocative actions that contributed to the dangerous dynamics on the ground. Violence and incitement must be clearly condemned and unequivocally rejected by all. In that context, I commend initiatives by civil society organizations and other leaders calling for peace, reconciliation and the rejection of violence.

The fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to release the full information on their status immediately, as required by international humanitarian law. I also remain concerned by the continued Israeli practice of withholding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call on Israel to return withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Turning back to Gaza, in the context of a fragile cessation of hostilities, the United Nations is continuing to coordinate the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. I highlight the \$95 million humanitarian flash appeal launched on 27 May and thank members for the pledges and contributions made so far. All parties must also facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian relief. We are now moving quickly to ensure that there is a well-coordinated international response focused on the two million people in Gaza who have suffered for far too long.

I am particularly concerned that the Kerem Shalom crossing to Gaza from Israel has been effectively closed for over five weeks, with some narrow exceptions for food, animal feed and limited humanitarian items. Kerem Shalom should be open for regular, non-sensitive trade.

In the coming days, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union will soon release a rapid damage needs assessment that will estimate the longer-term reconstruction and recovery needs in Gaza.

In the first week of July, the donor group of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians will convene

an emergency meeting at which it will discuss how to quickly mobilize donor support in a common effort with the Palestinian Authority.

The \$150-million shortfall in the programme budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains a major concern. I welcome the resumption of funding from the United States in April and call on Member States to ensure that the Agency has the resources needed to conduct its operations.

It is also critical that the Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support of Egypt in that regard, and I call upon all Palestinian factions to make serious efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, legitimate, democratic national Government. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State, as part of a two-State solution.

In that context, I note that the postponement of the Palestinian elections has compounded frustrations and undermined hope for the Palestinian national project. I commend the tireless efforts of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, which ensured that all technical aspects were effectively implemented.

I am deeply concerned by the news today of the death of political candidate and activist Nizar Banat, who died in the context a Palestinian security forces arrest operation. I call for an independent investigation into his death and for those responsible to be held accountable.

In conclusion, I would once again like to highlight the significant risks we face over the coming period as we confront the prospect of a renewed escalation. While immediate international efforts are rightly focused on solidifying the cessation of hostilities, providing humanitarian assistance and beginning the process of Gaza's reconstruction, recent events have also highlighted the urgent need to re-establish a political horizon and restore hope to Palestinians and Israelis.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting the parties in resolving the conflict and ending the occupation in line with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements in pursuit of achieving the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and

sovereign Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

Even as we focus on the pressing challenges in Gaza, I reiterate our determination to work with Israelis and Palestinians, fellow members of the Middle East Quartet and key regional and international partners to lay the groundwork for a return to meaningful negotiations towards a viable two-State solution.

The President: I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, 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 those Council members who wish to make statements.

Ms. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and for all of his work over the past few weeks to preserve calm. We understand that he wants the opportunity to have a more in-depth conversation in closed consultations, so we will keep our public remarks brief.

Let us start where we all agree. We are all thankful for the end of hostilities, which surely saved the lives of many innocent people. Ending the violence was a necessary first step, but we all know it will not be the end of the story. The situation in the region remains precarious, and the efforts to avoid violence and reduce tensions are critical. It is essential to take steps to ensure calm and refrain from provocative actions.

Long before the cessation of hostilities, the United States, as well as our partners and allies, began working on ways to support better lives for Israelis and Palestinians. And on 25 May, Secretary Blinken announced \$38 million in new humanitarian assistance for the West Bank and Gaza. We also announced our intention, working with Congress, to provide \$75 million in additional development assistance and economic assistance over the next year, supporting relief and recovery in the West Bank and Gaza. Our aid will go far, but the needs — especially in Gaza — are vast. We call on the rest of the Security Council and the

international community to support these efforts and offer humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.

We welcome the United Nations efforts to support relief and recovery and we would also appreciate efforts to facilitate the flow of goods into and out of Gaza. We need a mechanism which allows authorities to mitigate any risk of diversion. It is absolutely critical that Hamas cannot divert resources and assistance from the Palestinian people who need it most, so all of us must work and coordinate with the United Nations, Israelis, Palestinians and other key actors to ensure that the designated beneficiaries are the ones who actually receive international assistance. They deserve to have their immediate needs met so that they can recover from the latest round of violence.

Of course, a sustainable solution will require more than emergency aid. It requires Israel, the Palestinian Authority and our international partners, working together, to chart a more constructive path forward. We need to address the underlying social tensions and avoid triggering the flashpoints that only make it more difficult to move forward.

There is new leadership in Israel. We congratulate the new Government and hope it can make serious headway on those issues. Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of security, democracy, dignity and prosperity. Achieving that goal is critical to ensuring peace and stability and avoiding violence over the long term. But in the meantime, we look forward to working with the new leadership in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, regional States and the Security Council to take concrete steps towards a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing and for his valuable contribution to de-escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2021/584).

Despite the ceasefire, the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories remains very tense. We are concerned about potential renewed outbreaks, given the ongoing provocations and aggression by groups of settlers and the occupying forces against Palestinian civilians and the fact that the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sites in Jerusalem is violated.

We also note with much concern that the occupying Power is implementing settlement plans that had been frozen in areas crucial for the contiguity of the Palestinian State, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General. The occupying Power also continues to demolish Palestinians' homes and confiscate their properties, including internationally funded humanitarian projects. We join the Secretary-General in warning about the grave consequences of the occupation authorities evicting Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem, especially from Shaykh Jarrah and Silwan.

We also strongly condemn the serious violations against children in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the use of live ammunition by the occupying forces, according to the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2021/437).

Tunisia once again calls on the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and put an end to those violations and practices, which are condemned by international law and conventions. The international community must bring pressure to bear on the occupying Power to respect international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It must refrain from any unilateral acts that could again lead to violence and undermine any prospect for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Tunisia also reiterates its call on the international community to guarantee protection for Palestinian civilians and to activate the principle of holding the occupying Power accountable for its acts of aggression and violations of international law.

The devastating effects of Israel's aggression against Gaza Strip in May, the ongoing unjust blockade and the violence against Palestinian residents in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in addition to the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic, have exacerbated the suffering of Palestinians. That requires redoubled efforts to increase the humanitarian response in the occupied Palestinian territories and to support rebuilding efforts. In that regard, we look forward to the response of the international community to the humanitarian appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for Gaza.

Palestine is still waiting for long-awaited justice to be served, an end to the occupation, the restoration of

Palestinian rights and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State along the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Security Council has a historic responsibility to guarantee the implementation of its relevant resolutions, the latest of which is resolution 2334 (2016), and to put an end to the occupation and the misery of the Palestinian people.

Given the delicate and sensitive nature of the situation, there is an urgent need today for an international, comprehensive and unified response — in coordination with the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Quartet and regional parties — to relaunch serious and credible negotiations in accordance with a timeline to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on international law, international legitimacy resolutions the agreed terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. We believe that this is the only way to restore security and stability to the region.

Tunisia will maintain its principled support for the struggle of the brotherly Palestinian people to put an end to the occupation and restore all their legitimate rights which are not subject to statute of limitations.

Mr. Swarup (India): I, too, thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

The recent developments in Palestine are of concern. After a period of brief calm, tensions are rising again in Gaza. The launch of incendiary balloons from Gaza targeting civilians in Israel and the retaliatory strikes into Gaza threaten to restart the cycle of violence, which recently caused immense suffering and resulted in deaths. We urge all parties to honour the ceasefire arrangement to ensure that the situation does not spiral out of control.

The situation in the West Bank remains volatile. We are concerned at the potential for renewed violence in East Jerusalem and other parts of West Bank over the legal process that could lead to possible evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods, in East Jerusalem. Incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, as witnessed during the recent escalation, only drive and fuel violence.

We urge all parties to de-escalate the situation and to refrain from acts of provocation, intimidation and incitement that exacerbate tensions. Any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo that undercuts efforts

to advance a negotiated two-State solution should also be avoided.

The attention of the international community should not be diverted from the immediate need to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in Gaza. Such assistance should reach the Palestinian people through verified channels. We call for reinforced cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in the area of humanitarian aid delivery, including food and medicine, and the movement of patients in and out of Gaza. We welcome the role played by United Nations agencies in facilitating the delivery of such aid, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in particular.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of Gaza should also be prioritized. We recognize the centrality of the Palestinian Authority to the delivery of international assistance to the Palestinian people. We encourage all Palestinian parties to work with the Palestinian Authority to ensure the well-being of the people of Palestine. We take note of the postponement of the reconciliation meeting of all Palestinian parties that had been facilitated by Egypt and hope that the parties will overcome the current stalemate. We believe that intra-Palestinian unity is critical to achieving a peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The peace process can no longer be kept on the back burner. The continuation of the impasse only exacerbates the trust deficit between the parties and increases the chances of the cycle of violence recurring. I again underscore the need for the immediate resumption of the Middle East peace process and direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. India supports all diplomatic efforts, including by the Quartet, that are aimed at strengthening the collective commitment of the international community to resume those negotiations and facilitate the peace process.

Let me conclude by reaffirming India's unwavering commitment to the establishment of an independent, viable and democratic State of Palestine. There is no alternative to a two-State solution for ensuring meaningful and enduring peace.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his valuable briefing.

Since the ceasefire was announced on 21 May, the situation in and around Gaza has been relatively calm.

However, we remain seriously concerned about the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where the violence continues to cause civilian casualties. According to reports, in the last few months at least 39 Palestinians have been killed and more than 8,000 injured, many of whom were shot in the back.

The use of excessive force and live ammunition against civilians is deplorable. If such incidents continue in one place, it is only a matter of time before they spark the next cycle of violence in other places. Viet Nam therefore calls on the Israeli authorities to exercise utmost restraint.

At the same time, we are also troubled by reports of inflammatory rhetoric, particularly racist slogans against Arabs. Neither anti-Arabism nor anti-Semitism is acceptable, as they not only erode trust but also undermine any chance for reconciliation. There is every security reason to condemn and eliminate hateful and racist acts of all kinds. It is the responsibility of the relevant authorities not to allow such acts to happen.

We remain deeply concerned by the continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian property, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, and the possible forced eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. We call on the Israeli authorities to end those activities and abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law. Settlement expansion, demolitions and forced evictions only deepen distrust, undermine prospects for negotiations and trigger violence.

Viet Nam calls for every effort to be made to bring the parties back to the negotiating table towards a two-State solution that includes the establishment of a 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 of the pre-1967 lines and a negotiated settlement, and in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We also welcome the efforts of the relevant parties to promote the Middle East peace process.

Finally, we are gravely concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza following the hostilities in May. In that connection, we welcome the recent launching of an additional \$164 million humanitarian and early recovery appeal by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We call on the international

community to support that appeal and other emergency response actions implemented by UNRWA in Gaza and the West Bank to bring life back to normal, including the restoration of critical infrastructure.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I, too, would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

On 22 May, the President of the Security Council issued a press statement welcoming the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza (SC/14527). However, it is worrisome that less than a month later, the Israeli Government approved the Flag Day parade in the holy city, a move that escalated tensions, and once again conducted air strikes against Gaza.

Those acts have cast a shadow over the already fragile ceasefire. China urges all parties, Israel in particular, to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any provocations, violence targeting civilians, or any acts that might intensify friction.

Israel must seriously uphold and respect the historic significance and current status of the holy city of Jerusalem and sincerely respect and protect the religious rights of Muslims.

Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories constitute an obstacle to peace between Palestine and Israel and to the prospect of the two-State solution. In total disregard of the objections of the international community, Israel has been advancing its settlement plans, approving more than 540 additional housing units and ordering the demolition of the houses of 50 Palestinian families.

In Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, in East Jerusalem, Palestinians still face the risk of eviction and live in fear of becoming homeless and displaced. The settlement activities being undertaken totally contravene international law and represent a serious violation of the right to self-determination and sovereignty of the Palestinian people. As such, they constitute one of the triggers of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We urge Israel to observe resolution 2334 (2016), immediately cease its settlement activities in the occupied territories, stop its demolition of Palestinian houses and its eviction of Palestinian people, and effectively halt the deteriorating violence relating to settlers.

The conflict in May caused numerous civilian casualties, including 66 children in Gaza, and heavily damaged infrastructure in Gaza, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories. In its press statement SC/14527, issued in May, the Council called for the rapid and sustainable reconstruction and recovery in Gaza. China has provided Palestine with \$1 million dollars in cash as emergency humanitarian assistance. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations, the World Bank, Egypt and other countries of the region towards rebuilding Gaza. We urge Israel to open the relevant crossings in Gaza, fully lift its blockade against Gaza as soon as possible and facilitate access for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction supplies rather than creating obstacles and setting preconditions.

The protracted turmoil in the Palestinian-Israeli situation in recent years is caused largely by the fact that the Middle East peace process has been diverted from its correct track, the United Nations resolutions have not been implemented and Palestine's right to independent statehood has been repeatedly violated. The international community must take an objective and impartial stand and make vigorous efforts to relaunch the peace process. The Security Council must implement its mandate to maintain international peace by promoting efforts to alleviate the situation, rebuild trust and seek a political settlement. Countries that have significant influence in the region must take an objective and impartial stand and refrain from favouring one side and from practising double standards.

China supports the United Nations, in particular Special Coordinator Wennesland, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, other regional organizations, Egypt, Qatar and other countries in their continued efforts to promote peace talks and strengthen international coordination so as to foster broader and more effective cooperation towards peace. As a true friend of the Palestinian people, China will continue to firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people to achieve their national rights and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with full sovereignty and East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East, with its usual words of death, destruction and violations of all kinds.

My delegation followed the Special Coordinator's briefing with great interest, and we take note of the Secretary-General's observations on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (see S/2021/584). The report gives no cause for optimism, and we can but reiterate the same truths. After several years of paralysis, in 2016 the Security Council reached a historic consensus, which enabled the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). The objective of that resolution was to preserve the two-State solution as the basis for a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by demanding that Israel immediately cease all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Five years later, it is regrettable to note that Israel continues to ignore that resolution as well as many others that preceded it on the same issue.

The Niger deplores the lack of effective action to implement resolution 2334 (2016), and we remain concerned about the worrisome elements highlighted in the latest report of the Secretary-General. Among such elements, one can note the violations of the principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular the unbridled continuation of the illegal expansion of settlements on Palestinian land, including in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. That practice of expropriation and settlement of Palestinian land has reached a new milestone, with the planned evictions from the Sheik Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods, which, unfortunately, led to the deadly 11-day conflict between the Israeli army and Hamas last month.

My delegation notes that the intensification of settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories undermines the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, eroding the prospects for the establishment of a future sovereign, contiguous, independent and viable Palestinian State, while also increasing the risk of confrontation. The Security Council must therefore do everything that it can to stop such activities.

At this point in my statement, I would like to mention another equally worrisome element, also highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, which characterizes Israel's policy in the occupied Palestinian territories, namely, the continued demolition of Palestinian structures, the seizure of property and the forced eviction of Palestinian families from their homes, very often on the basis of military regulations. In only three

months, no fewer than 72 Palestinian structures have been demolished or seized and nearly 218 households in East Jerusalem, comprising 970 people, including 424 children, face eviction proceedings in Israeli courts. The despair and desolation of entire families put on the street can only fuel the risk of further confrontation.

All that is done in flagrant violation of international law, which forbids the occupying Power from taking such actions. We call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to work to reverse the trend that has led to the deplorable acts of the past month, which will only deepen the divisions and jeopardize the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between the two peoples.

Therefore, in the light of the events of May, we call on the international community, the Quartet, the members of the Council and regional actors to continue to use their influence to achieve a halt to all acts and practices that jeopardize peace and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. It is also crucial to work for the resumption of the peace process with a view to achieving the only viable two-State solution to the conflict.

The situation in Gaza is another source of concern so rightly addressed by the Secretary-General's report. As we know, long before the outbreak of tensions in May, the Gaza Strip, a veritable open-air prison, was languishing under the weight of an illegal blockade that Israel has maintained over the area for 15 years, with almost half of its population unemployed, a density of almost 5,500 inhabitants per square kilometre, a failing health system and a very high rate of contamination with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). That harsh reality has been compounded by the consequences of the recent Israeli bombardment, with the total or partial destruction of several civilian infrastructures, including residential houses, health centres and schools, the presence of a large quantity of explosive remnants of war, including buried bombs, and nearly 8,500 people without shelter. Those many challenges require urgent responses for the reconstruction and recovery of Gaza and the protection and survival of its people.

In that regard, we call on the international community to be more generous to the population of Gaza, who have suffered so much. It is essential that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East be provided with the means to continue to deliver its vital services to the thousands of Palestinian families in need, especially

after the Israeli bombardment during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is equally crucial that Israel, as the occupying Power, fully comply with its responsibilities under international humanitarian law to ensure the well-being and survival of the population under its control.

I would like to conclude my remarks by reiterating that now more than ever it is time for us to step up our efforts and pressure to make resolution 2334 (2016) fully relevant. It is time to act for the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State because maintaining the status quo will simply perpetuate hatred, violence and human suffering in this magnificent region, the cradle of three monotheistic religions.

The Niger welcomes the efforts of Tor Wennesland and reaffirms its full commitment to supporting all of the international community's efforts to reach a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Wennesland, for his continued efforts in advancing the peace process with his counterparts in the Middle East Quartet and key regional partners, as well as Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

The Secretary-General's current report (S/2021/584) reminds us once again of the fragility of the 20 May ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. Based on the current events over the past couple of weeks, of great concern is Jerusalem becoming the core of clashes, with different parties trying to exploit the sensitive status of Jerusalem to pursue violent ends.

While congratulating the new Israeli Government, we urge it now to resolve possible forced evictions of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem. We call on all parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and acts of provocation and incitement, including violent rioting, marches and the exploitation of popular anger by extremist groups. Such acts contribute further to the fragility of the peace of Jerusalem and of the region.

The Secretary-General's report reflects alarming figures of fatalities, injuries and displacements. I reaffirm Kenya's condemnation of all acts of violence and other breaches on resolution 2334 (2016), by all parties, including acts of terrorism as well as all acts of provocation, incitement, evictions and any form of

collective punishment in the destruction and demolition of civilian infrastructure.

We strongly condemn the recent launches of incendiary devices from Gaza by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant groups. No cause can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians. Those terrorist acts must cease.

As Kenya has stated before, the practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will need to address the issue of settlements, territorial contiguity and the viability of the two-State solution. The establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law, remains a major obstacle to the realization of the vision of a two-State solution, whereby two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines.

The implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will also need to address the immediate socioeconomic repercussions of acts that violate all aspects of the resolution, including those that continue to entrench the economic isolation of parts of the region from the wider regional and global economy.

All those elements have implications for the peace, security and stability of the broader Middle East region.

Kenya welcomes the ongoing efforts towards an integrated humanitarian recovery package in Gaza. The strengthened role and reinforced funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will also go a long way to addressing a broader set of socioeconomic challenges in the occupied Palestinian territory. We encourage all efforts to ensure that the recovery and rebuilding is protected from being exploited by terrorist groups, who use human shields to launch their attacks or hide their weaponry.

We welcome and urge continued efforts aimed at ensuring equity in access to vaccines and medical care as a prerequisite for equitable socioeconomic recovery.

I conclude by reaffirming that the recent gains achieved following the 11 days of hostilities in May need to be safeguarded to reinforce the underlying principles of resolution 2334 (2016) — namely, achieving the stabilization of the situation, reversing negative trends on the ground and creating conditions for successful direct final-status negotiations. We saw immediate

positive regional mediation efforts and dynamics, and we believe that, if they are reinforced by a commitment to the principle of building bridges on multiple platforms, they will contribute to the comprehensive implementation of resolution 2334 (2016)

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing, which, together with the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/584), painted a grim picture of developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Illegal settlement activity further entrenches the illegal Israeli occupation, undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, encroaching on Palestinian land and natural resources, hampering free movement and increasing the risks of violent confrontation. And it undermines the prospects for achieving a two-State solution.

Ireland condemns violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, including damage to property and farmland, and recalls Israel's obligation to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population and to investigate.

Ireland also strongly condemns rocket and other attacks by Hamas and others from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Ireland calls on Hamas to provide full information on the fate of two Israeli civilians and on the remains of two Israeli soldiers, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We acknowledge Israel's legitimate security concerns but recall that self-defence must be exercised in a proportionate way and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In the wake of the recent conflict, Ireland calls on Israel to work with others to ensure the unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. Failing that, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate and the needs of the people of Gaza will continue to grow. Israel must also facilitate the passage of essential humanitarian and reconstruction personnel, including Palestinian nationals.

Ireland echoes the Secretary-General's call for an integrated and robust package of support for swift and sustainable reconstruction and recovery that supports the Palestinian people and strengthens their institutions.

We reiterate our strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies and commend its staff for their continued unstinting service. The de facto authorities in Gaza must allow them to do that work — not least for the well-being of the civilian population. We must acknowledge, however, as Mr. Wennesland has, that humanitarian or economic support alone will not address the challenges in Gaza or in the occupied Palestinian territory as a whole; only progress towards a lasting political solution can do that.

Ireland welcomes the new Israeli Government and looks forward to constructive engagement. We urge Israel to take steps to address the root causes of conflict by ending the expansion of illegal settlements, demolitions and the threat of forced evictions and allowing for legal construction for Palestinians. As resolution 2334 (2016) makes clear, such steps are essential for salvaging the two-State solution and reversing the negative trends that imperil the vision of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State on the 1967 lines, alongside a secure state of Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Today we are called on to reflect together on the ongoing crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. For more than 54 years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has afflicted the Middle East landscape. For the situation to be mutually acceptable and conducive to a desirable future for Palestinians and Israelis alike, the violence must end, and a negotiated political agreement must conform to a two-State solution, putting an end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory. Indeed, Special Coordinator Wennesland just re-emphasized the critical importance of the latter. In our view, this is the only way to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is deeply troubled by the progressively worsening situation on the ground, which is moving us further and further away from the two-State solution. We strongly condemn the Israeli air strikes in Gaza on 15 June in violation of the announced ceasefire of 21 May. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and any acts that would impede the resumption of constructive dialogue between them.

My delegation rejects the status quo of the continued Israeli occupation and displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the blockade of Gaza that led to the recent

hostilities. We continue to be concerned about the possible eviction of several Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. We reiterate our call to Israel to adhere to international law and comply with relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), and to end the ever-increasing settlement activities, property demolitions and evictions in Palestinian territory.

The Security Council must assume its obligations and responsibilities in maintaining peace and security. We must send the strong, clear and unequivocal message to the Israeli Government that policies of violence against civilians, of provoking religious sentiment and of political prevarication will not lead to a positive outcome.

In Gaza, reconstruction demands several urgent steps, including a unified Palestinian Government and the lifting of the 15-year-old Israeli blockade. We commend the role of the United Nations and its partners in implementing the critical economic and humanitarian interventions. However, more needs to be done to build back better, improve resilience and successfully recover Palestinian livelihoods. At this critical juncture for Palestinians in Gaza, it is imperative that the international community increase funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and support the flash appeal requesting \$95 million to address the needs of 1.1 million Palestinians in the areas of protection, health, water and sanitation, education and food security.

In closing, we remain committed to working with the parties and members of the Security Council for an end to the occupation with the creation of a thriving Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel, within secure and recognized borders, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Repkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

In the context of the information provided by the Special Coordinator on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), we express our concern about the continuing illegal settlement activity, which is one

of the main obstacles to achieving a two-State solution. We are seriously concerned by the fact that the recent increase in the pace of issuing construction permits for new housing units, as well as the seizure of Palestinian property, has led to escalation.

Over the past month, Palestinians, especially those in the Gaza Strip, as well as people in Israel, have witnessed the horrendous consequences of an armed confrontation. Some 259 Palestinians died, of whom 66 were children. Unfortunately, according to information we have received, tensions in East Jerusalem, particularly in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, have not abated. In those areas and in areas in the West Bank, clashes between Palestinians and Israelis have been taking place, and at any moment the situation could spiral out of control.

In that regard, we call on both sides to show restraint, and we call on the new Government of Israel to reject unilateral steps that create irreversible realities on the ground. We think it is important to, through the mediation of regional partners — first and foremost, our Egyptian friends — solidify the still fragile cessation-of-hostilities regime. We draw particular attention to the need to preserve the status quo of Jerusalem's holy places, with the special role being played by the Jordanian monarchy. The most pressing challenge remains providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza and restoring destroyed infrastructure. In this regard, we highly value the work being done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose funding should be stable and predictable.

In the interests of achieving long-term stabilization, which is possible only through a just resolution of the Palestinian question on an international legal basis, including United Nations resolutions, we intend to continue efforts aimed at launching a direct Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. We call on our Quartet colleagues to consider our well-known initiatives, including an expanded-format meeting with the participation of States of the region.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

We welcome the formation of the new Israeli Government, which we hope will continue to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority, particularly

on security, tax-collection and public-health matters. We also recognize that nearly 30 per cent of the new Government's cabinet members are women, and we hope that the full, equal and substantive participation of women and minorities will continue to grow.

Furthermore, we applaud efforts towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation. At the same time, we urge the Palestinian Authority to call new elections. Regular, transparent and inclusive elections are a central foundation for building a democratic State.

Despite last May's ceasefire, we note with concern the fragile stability in the area. In the past week alone, there have been reports of rocket fire from Gaza, and violence persists in East Jerusalem. We condemn such attacks on Israel and deplore the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army and law-enforcement agencies. We urge the parties to avoid provocations and attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure and that they exercise maximum restraint.

It is imperative that the endless cycle of violence and reconstruction, which has prevailed in the Gaza Strip in recent years, be broken. We welcome the recent meetings between Israeli and Egyptian officials and the efforts of the Special Coordinator. We hope that these meetings will contribute to promoting a genuine, durable and sustainable ceasefire. The prosperity of the Palestinian population is an element in the security and stability not only of Palestine and Israel, but of the Middle East as a whole.

Restrictions on freedom of movement by land and sea are one of the main causes of the severe humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

Population growth has increased the demand for goods and services, while restrictions severely impact economic activity. As the Palestinian territories enjoy close commercial, cultural and family ties, the movement of people and goods is therefore essential. We accordingly believe that it imperative to lift the blockade

of Gaza once and for all, guarantee unrestricted access for humanitarian operations and redouble support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. With regard to the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), in addition to the situation in Gaza, the construction and expansion of settlements continues, as well as the clashes, in the occupied territories.

Jerusalem must serve an example of tolerance and coexistence where its inhabitants can live in harmony. In accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, we condemn all actions that attempt to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the city of Jerusalem. The construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation and demolition of property and the consequent displacement of the Palestinian population are violations of international humanitarian law, which represent an obstacle to the peace process. We call on the civilian population to refrain from attacks and provocations and urge the Israeli Government to definitively suspend the eviction of Palestinian families residing in East Jerusalem.

Lastly, I reiterate the urgent need to address the underlying causes of the conflict and actions that are in violation of international law, such as settlement expansion, for the sake of the peace process, and the viability of a future Palestinian State. We fully support the Secretary-General's call for the two-State solution, based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We hope that the Middle East Quartet for peace and other initiatives will bear fruit as soon as possible. Palestinians and Israelis deserve a better prospect for peace.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I will now adjourn the meeting so that the Council can continue its discussion in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.