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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Shringla	(India)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Estonia	Mr. Lipand
	France	Mrs. Gasri
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Niger	Mr. Aougi
	Norway	Ms. Heimerback
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Miguel
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam	Mrs. Tra Phuong Nguyen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: More than three months have passed since the deadly escalation between Israel and militants in Gaza, and the situation remains tense. In response, the United Nations continues to engage all sides to maintain calm and provide urgent assistance to Gaza's residents.

On 19 August, the State of Qatar announced a contribution of \$40 million over four months to the United Nations to provide cash assistance to some 100,000 needy families in Gaza. I welcome Qatar's contribution to support vulnerable families, which comes in addition to the \$10 million per month that Qatar already gives to provide the programme of the United Nations Office for Project Services to support fuel to the Gaza power plant. Those two efforts combined are vital to improving the dire socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of the Gaza Strip.

Such support came following the United Nations humanitarian appeal in May and its call to the international community at the technical meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) in July to work with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the United Nations on implementing a robust programme of humanitarian aid and recovery for the Gaza Strip, developed in full contact with the Palestinian Authority. As the United Nations is about to implement the programme of cash assistance for needy families, I wish to thank the Government of Qatar for its generous support to those programmes, and the Palestinian Authority for its support for them.

In addition, some \$45 million of the requested \$95 million has been raised for the United Nations humanitarian flash appeal, and an additional nearly \$55 million has been mobilized in support of the humanitarian response more broadly. I again thank donors for their generous support, while reiterating that further contributions are urgently needed.

Concerning the continued level of violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period, in Gaza, militants launched incendiary balloons on multiple occasions, and one rocket towards Israel. The rocket was intercepted, causing no damage, while the balloons caused several fires in areas around the Gaza Strip. In retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces fired some 37 missiles against Hamas targets, resulting in damage but no injuries.

Tensions along the Gaza perimeter reached a peak on 21 August, when hundreds of Palestinians attended a rally organized by Palestinian factions. During the demonstration, hundreds of people approached the security fence and threw stones and, reportedly, improvised explosive devices towards Israeli security personnel. Israeli forces fired on Palestinian protesters, injuring 51 Palestinians, including 25 children, the vast majority due to live ammunition. One Palestinian man and a 12-year-old Palestinian boy subsequently died of their wounds. One Israeli soldier was shot by a Palestinian and later died of his injuries. That evening, Israel launched six retaliatory air strikes against what it said were Hamas military sites in Gaza.

On 25 August, another demonstration near the security fence east of Khan Younis led to another clash between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. Fourteen Palestinians were injured, including five by live ammunition.

I reiterate that children must never be targeted or put in harm's way, and I call on all sides to show restraint, avoid provocations at the fence and keep the protests peaceful.

In the occupied West Bank, clashes, attacks, search-and-arrest operations, including in Area A, and other incidents resulted in the death of nine Palestinians, including two children, and injuries to more than 280 Palestinians, including with live ammunition or, in the case of the vast majority, with rubber bullets. One Israeli security personnel was injured during those events.

Near-daily clashes near Beita village, in the northern West Bank, took place in the context of protests against the nearby outpost of Evyatar, which is held by Israeli security forces after settlers evacuated the location in July. In more than 100 days of protests, seven Palestinians were killed and 972 injured by Israeli security forces, with one killed and 226 injured during the reporting period.

On 27 July, a Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli security forces near Beita. According to Israeli forces, the man advanced towards Israeli soldiers holding a suspicious object and ignored warning shots. The man, reportedly a water technician, was seen on video with a pipe wrench near a water pump shortly before he was shot. Israeli authorities said they opened an investigation. On 6 August, another Palestinian was killed by Israeli security forces' live fire in Beita during clashes with those forces.

On 28 July, an 11-year-old Palestinian boy was killed in Beit Ummar after the ISF fired at the car in which he was travelling with his father and siblings. Israeli authorities have opened an investigation. The next day, the ISF killed a 20-year-old Palestinian man amid clashes during the boy's funeral.

On 3 August, six Palestinians were injured during an exchange of fire with Israeli security forces in the Jenin refugee camp, in Area A of the West Bank, including a 25-year-old man, who later succumbed to his wounds. On 16 August, four Palestinians were killed and another was injured by live ammunition in an exchange of fire with Israeli security forces during an Israeli search operation in the camp.

On 24 August, Israeli forces killed a 15-year-old boy with live ammunition during an arrest operation in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. According to Israeli officials, the boy had been threatening to throw a large object at Israeli security forces personnel. However, witnesses dispute the account and say that the boy was shot in the head by Israeli security forces personnel at some distance.

During the reporting period, six Palestinians, including one woman and one child, were injured in five violent incidents involving Israeli settlers. Palestinians perpetrated attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting in five injuries and damage to property.

On 17 August, a 15-year-old Palestinian boy was attacked in the northern West Bank, during which a group of Israeli settlers kidnapped the boy, tied him to a tree and brutally assaulted, cut and burned him. The boy, who lost consciousness, was eventually handed over to a Palestinian ambulance. I am deeply concerned about this heinous act, and I expect the Israeli authorities to undertake a swift, thorough and transparent investigation and ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable.

I am concerned about the continued tragic loss of life and serious injuries in the occupied Palestinian territory. I note that settler violence against Palestinian civilians is recurrent in my reporting to the Council. Further measures must be taken to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligation to protect Palestinian civilians from violence, including by Israeli settlers, and to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for such attacks. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

In a concerning incident on 14 August, during the protests in Beita, Palestinians set fire to a Star of David containing the image of a swastika. Such displays of anti-Semitism are unacceptable. I urge all parties to refrain from incitement and provocative actions.

During the reporting period, Palestinian civil society organizations and human rights defenders continued to face restrictions on their freedoms of expression, assembly and association. On 29 July, Israeli security forces reportedly conducted searches of the offices of the Bisan Center for Research and Development and the Defence for Children International-Palestine in Ramallah and confiscated equipment. On 21 August, Palestinian security forces arrested 23 people in Ramallah for their participation in a planned demonstration, the majority of them before the protest started. Several of those arrested were well-known human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and political activists. All the detained were subsequently released.

I call on Israel to take all necessary measures to protect the right to freedom of association and ensure that human rights organizations in the occupied Palestinian territory are protected from arbitrary actions. I also urge the Palestinian Authority to immediately stop arrests of human rights defenders,

journalists and activists on charges that impinge upon the exercise of freedom of expression.

Israeli demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes and other structures continued throughout the reporting period. Overall, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 81 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 22 in East Jerusalem — displacing 165 Palestinians, including 33 women and 98 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. On 4 August, 17 structures were seized in the Bedouin community of Ibziq in the Jordan Valley — displacing 27 people, including 19 children. The confiscation was carried out due to the community's location in an Israeli-declared "firing zone".

On 2 August, Israel's Supreme Court held a hearing to consider an appeal request by four Palestinian families facing eviction in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. The judges proposed a compromise, which was not agreed to, and the hearing was adjourned with no date to reconvene. On 15 August, the Supreme Court postponed the eviction of several other Palestinian families living in the same area of Sheikh Jarrah, pending a decision on their request to appeal the decision to evict them. On 11 August, the Jerusalem Local Affairs Court froze the demolition of several dozen structures in the Al-Bustan section of the Silwan neighbourhood until 10 February 2022, pending planning discussions that are under way. I urge Israel to cease the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Returning to the situation in Gaza, I note a gradual and partial easing of the access restrictions by Israeli authorities. On 29 July, the fishing zone was again expanded to 12 nautical miles after being restricted for four days in response to the launching of incendiary balloons into Israel from the Gaza Strip. On 13 and 26 August, Israeli authorities announced additional easing of import and export restrictions. For the first time in 18 months, permits will be given to 2,000 Palestinian traders and 350 businesspeople to cross from Gaza into Israel.

While some 6,000 trucks — including of construction materials, food and non-food items and fuel — entered Gaza through Kerem Shalom, the

volume of trade still remains below pre-escalation levels. On 23 August, for the first time in over six months, Egyptian authorities closed the Rafah crossing to all movement, and reopened it fully on 29 August.

Although movement and access in and out of Gaza should be further improved, no amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will address the challenges facing Gaza. The current gradual approach is a holding operation and not a strategic way forward or a solution for the people of Gaza. Gaza requires political solutions that will see a full lifting of Israeli closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), as well as the return of a legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza and the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State of which Gaza is an integral part. It must also see Hamas and other armed groups stop the launching of incendiary devices, rockets and mortars and end the militant build-up.

Following the takeover by Hamas of a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Agency reiterated, in an 11 August statement, that its installations are inviolable at all times. The Agency protested the takeover and condemned the existence and potential use of structures, including tunnels, under its premises in the strongest possible terms. While Hamas subsequently vacated the school, such actions undermine the inviolability and neutrality of UNRWA premises and compromise the safe return of children to their schools on time. UNRWA and the United Nations Mine Action Service are working to remove any remaining unexploded ordnance as soon as possible.

The state of the Palestinian Authority's finances remains precarious. While the monthly transfer of clearance revenues from Israel to the PA occurs regularly, Israel continues to deduct an amount equivalent to what is calculated as paid by the PA to the families of prisoners and martyrs. Those deductions, along with numerous other fiscal leakages, make it increasingly difficult for the PA to cover its minimum expenditures, including salaries to Government employees and social protection payments to needy households. I urge Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the impasse over the prisoner payment scheme and other fiscal leakages; and I call on donors to provide urgent financial support to the PA.

On a positive note, on 29 July, the Israeli Ministers of Health and Environmental Protection met with their

Palestinian counterparts for the first time in many years, amid an increase in engagement between Israeli and Palestinian officials. On 29 August, yesterday, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz met with President Abbas in Ramallah, where they discussed security policy and economic issues, among other aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. That was the highest-level meeting between the two sides since the formation of the current Israeli Government. I welcome that dialogue, and I encourage more ministerial-level engagement, particularly to advance financial and economic cooperation. I hope that such contacts can result in bringing the parties to a position to advance unresolved issues, including political ones and those related to the implementation of agreements made by the parties.

On 27 August, Israeli Prime Minister Bennett met with United States President Biden. The two sides exchanged views on the efforts to advance peace, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians, and reaffirmed the importance of Israel's historic partnerships with Egypt and Jordan, as well as expanding relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Turning to the region, in Lebanon, the Government formation process has yet to yield tangible progress. The lifting of fuel subsidies on 11 August exacerbated fuel shortages, causing widespread disruption in service delivery. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remains tense following the launching of rockets from Lebanon towards Israel on 4 and 6 August — the latter instance claimed by Hizbullah. Israel responded on both occasions with artillery fire, as well as air strikes in southern Lebanon on 5 August. UNIFIL remains engaged with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to defuse tensions.

On the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained, despite the continued volatile situation and violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties. On 17 August, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed projectiles fired from west to north-east of their positions' strike locations and heavy explosions on the Bravo side. UNDOF continues to observe the presence of unauthorized military personnel and equipment in the area of separation.

Finally, demonstrable change is needed on the ground, especially for the people living in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

I remain extremely concerned by the dire financial situation facing the Palestinian Authority and its ability to withstand the ongoing fiscal and health crises. That may affect all Palestinians. It is critical that the PA be empowered to exercise its responsibilities throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including on reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee remains the established mechanism whereby the parties and donors can address relevant issues pertaining to the economic situation of PA institution-building. The next meeting of the AHLC can work out plans for how outstanding issues can be addressed by the parties, with the support of donors and the United Nations.

I also believe that no positive, hopeful step should be wasted, and despite the formidable challenges, we should help provide momentum to that renewed engagement.

Nevertheless, serious political efforts are required to return to meaningful negotiations that will address all final-status issues and achieve a negotiated end to the occupation and the vision of two States, living side by side in peace and security, based on the 1967 borders, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and signed agreements. In the meantime, both sides should abide by the signed agreements and avoid unilateral actions that change the reality on the ground and undermine the two-State solution.

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

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Foreign Secretary of India.

I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I also note the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine in the Chamber.

We are concerned by the recent escalation in the Gaza Strip, which once again underscores the fragility of the ceasefire and the urgent need for addressing the underlying causes that triggered the escalation. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire and refrain from acts that could exacerbate tensions and worsen the security situation. We recognize the efforts made by the United Nations and countries of the region

to prevent the hostilities from escalating into another military conflict.

I reaffirm India's call for the regular and predictable transfer of aid and other essential items to Gaza to ease the humanitarian situation and facilitate early reconstruction, as well as for the appropriate use of such aid. It is also important that the international donor community support the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip through the Palestinian Authority. We take note of the incremental relaxation of restrictions for the entry of commodities into the Gaza Strip and urge the parties to work together to ensure timely access to such relief for the Palestinians. That would create conditions that will help in preventing another round of escalation.

The recent agreement for the resumption of cash assistance to needy Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip is an important development, as it would provide much needed relief for those families. We also appreciate the work of agencies like the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme to ensure the delivery of critical aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The West Bank continues to witness incidents of violence and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. Both sides must desist from provocative actions, in the interest of peace and stability. We note the progress in the legal challenge to the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and underscore the need for respecting the historic status quo in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhoods. We also urge parties to refrain from unilateral measures that undermine the viability of a two-State solution.

Amid those concerns, the decision taken by Israel to increase the number of work permits issued to Palestinians will help strengthen both the Palestinian and Israeli economies. Furthermore, the recognition of coronavirus disease vaccination certificates issued by the Palestinian Authority and the facilitation of the passage of patients from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank are also positive signs. India welcomes all measures that create greater opportunities for the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian people.

India's development cooperation with Palestine is also geared towards that objective. We have assisted in building schools and setting up information and communications technology and vocational training centres, a technology park and a national printing

press and are supporting several other quick-impact community projects in Palestine.

High-level interaction between Israel and Palestine contributes to a better environment for the resumption of direct peace negotiations. We hope to see an early commencement of those negotiations between the two sides, as they provide the best opportunity to resolve all final-status issues and achieve a two-State solution. The international community, and the Middle East Quartet in particular, has an important role to play in reviving those negotiations.

Given our long-standing and firm commitment to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, within secure, recognized and mutually agreed borders, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, India will remain fully supportive of all efforts to restart the peace process.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and continued efforts in the region.

The United States is deeply concerned about the risk of escalation in the region, particularly in the light of the recent provocations, including the use of incendiary devices along the Gaza border, which we just heard about from the Special Coordinator. This most recent violence has made it even more difficult to deliver humanitarian relief following the violence in May. The United States urges Palestinians and Israelis to refrain from actions and rhetoric that inflame tensions and further endanger the fragile peace of the past three months. That includes incitement to violence, compensating individuals who are imprisoned for acts of terrorism, the annexation of territory, settlement activity, evictions and demolitions.

The United States is committed to a negotiated two-State solution. We firmly believe that Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of freedom, dignity, security and prosperity. The diplomacy of the United States will remain focused on practical steps to advance that vision in the immediate term.

We welcome the 19 August agreement between the United Nations and Qatar to resume aid to the

people of Gaza in need, including the 100,000 families who will receive \$100 monthly stipends through the World Food Programme starting next month. That will give many in Gaza the means to get food and other necessities to survive. We would like to thank Qatar for its generosity. The new arrangement will ensure aid reaches those most in need and is not misused by other parties. While that aid will address the most basic daily needs of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, much more must be done to facilitate relief and recovery as well as economic development in Gaza.

The United States therefore calls on the United Nations and Member States to redouble their efforts to help Gaza recover, including by facilitating regular predictable access in and out of Gaza, with appropriate safeguards against the risk of diversion. In addition, following the announcement by the United States of another \$136 million in humanitarian assistance to the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the region last month, the United States again urges other Member States to make financial commitments as well.

As we saw with the recent return of 290,000 students to UNRWA schools in Gaza, UNRWA services are a lifeline to many Palestinian refugees. We must therefore work collectively to advance the Agency's ability to sustain its core services over time. That includes making aid delivery more targeted and efficient. At the same time, the United States will continue to work with UNRWA and other donor countries to promote oversight and ensure that the Agency embodies the principles of the United Nations, namely, tolerance and respect.

The United States also wants to recognize the visit of the Israeli Foreign Minister to Morocco this month as the two countries upgraded their diplomatic relations. We certainly commend efforts to normalize relations between Israel, its neighbours and countries throughout the Middle East.

In conclusion, last week Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield joined President Biden and Prime Minister Bennett for their first meeting. That was an important opportunity to reaffirm our mutual commitment to Israel's security and to forging lasting peace in the region. Together, let all of us work towards that shared commitment and do everything we can to bring peace and prosperity to the Middle East.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I welcome the fact that you, Mr. President, are presiding over today's important meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I value India's firm position in favour of a just, durable and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, pursuant to international resolutions.

I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and all United Nations staff in the occupied territories for their efforts to enhance prospects for peace in the Middle East.

We meet again today to deliberate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and reiterate our positions in favour of the need to end the occupation and the protracted conflict. We meet here to state yet again that we categorically reject the expansionist settlement policies of the occupation authorities and their plans to annex land, demolish houses, displace Palestinian civilians and tighten the blockade on the Gaza Strip, in blatant violation of international law and binding resolutions adopted by the United Nations.

International positions support reaching a just, comprehensive and durable solution to the conflict based on international resolutions and the agreed upon terms of reference for a settlement. Nevertheless, the occupying Power continues to pursue oppressive policies, while evading accountability and disregarding international law. In the light of continued flagrant human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories and attempts to impose a *fait accompli*, Tunisia again calls upon the international community, in particular the Security Council, to fully shoulder its responsibility and compel the occupying Power to respect its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It should put an end to the violations, expansionist plans, settlement projects and any unilateral action that would deepen the conflict, lead to further escalation and undermine the opportunity to achieve peace and restore stability and security in the region.

We again call for accountability for flagrant violations of international law that have been committed by occupation authorities in the occupied Palestinian territories for decades. We reaffirm the need to protect Palestinian civilians from violence by settlers — occupation forces that use excessive force and carry out repeated attacks against Palestinian civilians.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains a cause for grave concern due to the blockade that was imposed more than 14 years ago and persists today, along with the deterioration of the situation on the ground at multiple levels, in particular following the most recent Israeli aggression, which resulted in a considerable number of casualties and widespread destruction of infrastructure and property.

In the light of the deteriorating social, economic and humanitarian situation, we call upon the international community to compel the occupation authorities to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and refrain from hindering reconstruction efforts. We also call upon international donors to increase the level of assistance and humanitarian response in the occupied Palestinian territories and to support relevant United Nations efforts.

In that connection, we stress the urgent need to fund the interventions of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We also underscore the need to continue Palestinian reconciliation efforts, and we welcome mediation efforts supporting that endeavour.

Peace and stability in the Middle East can be achieved only through a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with international law and international resolutions. Any attempt to impose a *fait accompli* will not change that reality or alter the legal and historical facts; and neither will it break the Palestinian people's determination to regain their legitimate rights, which are not subject to any statute of limitations.

Tunisia will maintain its firm and principled position in support of the Palestinian people and their aspirations for self-determination, an end to the occupation and the establishment of an independent, sovereign State on Palestinian territory, based on the 4 June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We are confident that concerted efforts by the international community, including the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet, the Secretary-General and neighbouring countries, can contribute to overcoming the current stalemate in the peace process and creating real chances for a settlement that can, in turn, lay the foundations for stability and peace and security in the region.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): My thanks go to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Let me start by once again reinforcing the need to prevent a further escalation in violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories and to restore calm. We share concerns about the recent tensions in Gaza and call on all parties to take steps to avoid exacerbating tensions and to maintain the cessation of hostilities.

The United Kingdom condemns unequivocally Hamas' indiscriminate attacks against Israel, including the use of incendiary balloons. We call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their rocket fire against Israel.

Our attention must remain on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact on Palestinians living there. It remains vital that Israel ensure regularized access into and out of Gaza, in accordance with international humanitarian law, especially for humanitarian actors and goods, for reconstruction materials and for medical purposes.

In the West Bank, we should all be troubled by the high number of Palestinians who have been killed by Israeli forces in recent weeks. Since our most recent debate on 28 July (see S/PV.8826), nine Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, including two children. We urge the Israeli authorities to conduct transparent and comprehensive investigations and to hold those responsible to account.

With regard to the handling of recent protests, we call on the Palestinian Authority to adhere to international standards of freedom of expression, association and assembly, and we urge respect for human rights. The use of violence against peaceful human rights defenders, activists and protesters and the mistreatment of those detained are unacceptable.

In Jerusalem, we remain concerned by the high number of evictions and demolitions, including in Shaykh Jarrah, Silwan and Al-Walaja. Unfortunately, in 2021 we have seen the pace of those unilateral Israeli actions increase across the West Bank. We urge Israel to refrain from actions that displace Palestinians from their homes, that act as a driver for conflict and are, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, illegal under international law. It is also vital to maintain calm on Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount and to uphold the historic status quo.

Against that fragile backdrop, we continue to see signs of hope. We are pleased to see Palestinian and Israeli firefighters working together to extinguish fires in Jerusalem. We want to see greater coordination and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly on economic initiatives, to help pave a pathway towards peace.

The first anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords this month is a reminder that the advancement of peace is possible. We welcome and urge continued engagement between the new Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership and call on both parties to work together to tackle immediate and long-term threats to peace and stability.

Our collective goal remains a two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, which the United Kingdom stands ready to support.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The situation in Gaza continues to be volatile. There is a clear need for long-term solutions, first and foremost in the form of a solid and lasting ceasefire. We commend Egypt's ongoing efforts in Gaza.

Let me highlight a positive development, namely, the memorandum of understanding between Qatar and the United Nations to provide cash assistance to approximately 100,000 families in need in Gaza. We welcome the contributions from Qatar and the efforts of the Special Coordinator and his team. In addition to alleviating the suffering of the civilian population, such assistance is critical for securing stability in Gaza.

With regard to regional stability, the continued ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to deliver essential services to Palestinian refugees remains crucial. We call for sufficient funding for the Agency.

Norway welcomes the fact that Israel has lifted some restrictions imposed on Gaza. We call for further steps to be taken, including an increase in the number of work permits for Gazans in Israel. The population of Gaza needs increased opportunities for economic activity, trade and travel, as well as genuine access to their fisheries.

Furthermore, we urge all actors to contribute to de-escalation and refrain from actions and rhetoric that could inflame tensions. We expect groups in Gaza to

uphold the ceasefire and attend to the needs of their own populations. The people of Gaza will not live in peace unless their leaders embrace it.

Only a broad political solution can solve the underlying problems of the conflict. We reiterate our call for a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, the relevant Security Council resolutions, international law and internationally agreed upon parameters.

I would like to reiterate our concern about Israel's illegal settlement activities, demolitions and evictions. The proposal to build 9,000 new settlement units in Atarot would further isolate Ramallah from East Jerusalem. With other plans in the area around Jerusalem, those settlements undermine the prospects of a contiguous Palestinian State and a viable two-State solution.

We are concerned about the rising levels of violence against Palestinians, particularly children, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Recently there have been violent clashes around the village of Beita in connection with demonstrations against attempts to establish a new outpost nearby.

We urge Israel to refrain from the excessive use of force and to ensure the protection of Palestinians against settler attacks. We reiterate that a strong Palestinian Authority is crucial to the delivery of services to the Palestinian people and development, both in the West Bank and in Gaza. A strong Palestinian Authority is one that is well-financed, well-functioning and accountable and that enjoys democratic legitimacy among the Palestinian people.

Norway is also concerned about the treatment of political activists and demonstrators by the Palestinian security forces, including recent arrests. We call on the Palestinian Authority to uphold its human rights obligations, including respect for the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly. We commend the new Israeli Government for resuming a broad dialogue with its Palestinian counterpart. We urge the parties to use that new momentum constructively to secure progress across a wide variety of outstanding issues.

The financial situation of the Palestinian Authority remains precarious. It is necessary to significantly increase its tax revenues. There is also tremendous potential for cooperating on matters such as trade, infrastructure, water, energy and telecommunications.

Furthermore, Norway calls on international donors to step up their assistance and contributions. These and other measures aimed at providing tangible benefits to the people on the ground will be discussed at the upcoming ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, which Norway will convene on 23 September in New York.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing.

Let me begin by expressing our concern at the recent increase in violence across the occupied Palestine territory. The number of casualties is on the rise, with an alarmingly excessive use of force against civilians.

In August alone, as mentioned by Mr. Wennesland, several men and boys were killed. In addition, nearly 1,000 were injured in the West Bank. Meanwhile, the situation in Gaza remains very volatile and is in danger of escalating into an intensified conflict owing to continued violations of the cessation of hostilities.

We are also particularly concerned about the risk of conflict over the holy sites in East Jerusalem. If the status quo is not respected, clashes will be inevitable and may escalate into religious conflicts. We believe that neither side would benefit from such a scenario.

We therefore call upon all relevant parties to exercise utmost restraint and continue to urge Israel to stop the excessive use of force. Dialogue and negotiation must be the main path to a sustainable settlement. We welcome the recent dialogue and encourage the parties concerned to maintain the momentum. We also urge all the parties to apply all necessary measures to protect civilians, especially women and children.

The deadly violence and the risk of escalation only underscore the need for a permanent ceasefire. We welcome the mediation efforts by international actors towards that end and call upon all parties concerned to resume negotiations with goodwill. In the absence of a permanent ceasefire and measures to uphold it, a new round of hostilities is just a matter of time.

While the cessation of violence is essential, the root causes of the conflict need to be addressed. Viet Nam is concerned by the recent report about a new proposal to expand settlements in the West Bank. Such settlement activities run counter to international law and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

We once again call for an end to such activities and to all other unilateral actions that escalate tensions, including the demolition of Palestinian homes and property in the West Bank. Palestinians have the right to build their own homes and to live safely in their communities.

We reaffirm our strong support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights. There is no alternative to a two-State solution that includes the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and a negotiated settlement. We welcome all initiatives aimed at bringing the relevant parties together towards that end.

Before concluding, we would like to stress the humanitarian situation in Gaza. As the new school year has begun, we strongly support the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to bring children back to school. At the same time, we are troubled by the reported violations of UNRWA-operated schools. Children and educational facilities must be protected from all sides in a conflict, as mentioned in resolution 2573 (2021).

We commend the international efforts coordinated by the United Nations in implementing the humanitarian response and stabilizing the situation. We call for further financial assistance from international donors to the Palestinian Authority to overcome the current dire financial situation. In that connection, we welcome the contribution made by Qatar and the memorandum of understanding signed between the United Nations and Qatar on 19 August for the delivery of assistance to Gaza.

Furthermore, despite the recent easing of commercial restrictions on the Strip, it remains essential to ensure the unhindered entry of all humanitarian assistance into Gaza. We continue to urge all relevant parties to allow the regular and predictable movement of goods into and out of the Strip in order to improve the provision of basic services, people's livelihoods and the wider economy.

Mrs. Gasri (France) (spoke in French): I, too, would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing and to welcome his continued efforts in recent months.

France is also very concerned by the severe tensions in Gaza. We call on all parties to exercise restraint to ensure that there is no new spiral of violence. We condemn the launching of incendiary balloons and rockets against Israel, which imperil civilian lives and violate international law. They must stop.

We call upon Israel to continue to ease conditions for entry and exit of goods and persons from Gaza. Assistance is essential for the people of Gaza following the most recent escalation. In that connection, we welcome the agreement between Qatar and the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance in Gaza. But more can and must be done. It is also imperative that such assistance be delivered to its intended beneficiaries; the Palestinian Authority has a key role to play here.

We are encouraged by the dialogue and the initial cooperation measures undertaken between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We call for the strengthening of that cooperation, which can contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust between the parties and meet common challenges, be they humanitarian, health-related, climate-related or economic.

France, together with its German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners, in the framework of the Amman Group, is determined to continue all specific reciprocal measures aimed at restoring trust between the parties, with a view to a resumption of the negotiations.

We are nonetheless concerned by the continued settlement policy. The announcement that construction permits had been granted Palestinians in Area C is an initial and encouraging sign, but it cannot obscure the fact that the continuing settlement policy contravenes international law and imperils the two-State solution. In that respect, we call on the Israeli authorities to refrain from any new settlement activity, stop demolitions and definitively suspend expulsion procedures aimed at Palestinian families from Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, in East Jerusalem.

All the parties must refrain from taking unilateral measures and commit themselves to respecting the status quo at holy sites in order to ensure that there is no new flare-up. France also calls for tangible progress in order to improve and strengthen Palestinian governance. Strong democratic institutions based on respect for the rule of law remain vital to a viable Palestinian State. In this regard, we deplore the recent arrests of members of

Palestinian civil society. We also call on the Palestinian Authority to shed full and transparent light on the circumstances of the death of Nizar Banat, following his arrest by Palestinian security forces in late June.

France reiterates its commitment to freedom of expression and respect for human rights in the Palestinian territories. We call on the Palestinian Authority to comply with its international commitments on this issue.

Finally, France remains convinced that the two-State solution is likely to meet the aspirations of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and to ensure the security of everyone as well as the stability of the region. We call on all members of the Security Council to take action to preserve the prospects for peace before it is too late.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the last debate under the Indian presidency of the Security Council, I would like to most sincerely congratulate you, Mr. President, on the successful way India conducted the Council's work during the month of August. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

As we have heard from the Special Coordinator this morning, we are once again faced with an uninspiring scenario in which the ceasefire between Gaza and Israel is looking increasingly fragile. The economic situation in the West Bank and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza continue to deepen, as evidenced by recurrent popular mobilization and the clashes with the forces of law and order that result.

Mexico has already pointed out on several occasions that it is essential to break the cycle of violence and not lose sight of the fact that the prosperity of the Palestinians contributes to the prosperity and security of the Israelis. In this regard, I would like to focus my remarks on the following points.

First, we express great concern about the fragile security situation. Mexico condemns the shelling of targets in the Gaza Strip, while we also condemn the firing of rockets and incendiary devices by militias in Gaza into Israel. We call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid provocations.

Secondly, unfortunately, restrictions on the entry and exit of people and goods from the Gaza Strip continue. While we acknowledge that Israel has authorized the clearance of some goods, it has clearly

been insufficient. We are particularly concerned about the delays in humanitarian assistance, and we regret the obstacles facing the import of materials for reconstruction in Gaza. We call upon Israel to lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip as soon as possible, and we urge Egypt to keep the Rafah border crossing open on a regular basis.

Restricting freedom of movement is a form of collective punishment that severely affects the civilian population. Respect for human rights in no way undermines security. Moreover, my country, Mexico, welcomes the agreement between Qatar and the United Nations that will facilitate the transfer of financial resources to Gaza. We also welcome the recent donation of 500,000 doses of vaccines for Palestine by the United States, of which 200,000 were destined for Gaza.

Thirdly, turning to the situation in the West Bank, Mexico notes with concern the frequency of clashes between Israeli law enforcement and Palestinian civilians. Recent incidents in the vicinity of Hebron, Nablus, Jenin and East Jerusalem, in which several Palestinians, including 12 minors, lost their lives as a result of ammunition fired by Israeli law enforcement agencies, are simply unacceptable. We urge Israel to observe its obligations under international humanitarian law and to redouble its efforts to protect the lives of civilians, particularly children.

Likewise, the recurrent acts of repression against popular demonstrations, arbitrary arrests and harassment of social activists and journalists by Palestinian security forces are of concern. Mexico calls on the Palestinian Authority to preserve the rights to freedom of expression and association. Respect for human rights and accountability are cornerstones in the construction of any democratic State.

Fourthly, we commend the Israeli diplomatic activism shown in recent high-level meetings with Moroccan and Egyptian officials. We also applaud the growing economic and public-health cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. Mexico hopes that such rapprochement will be deepened and that the dispute over the transfer of fiscal resources that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority will be resolved. The precarious budgetary situation of the Palestinian Authority is causing delays in the payment of civil servants' salaries, which is the main source of income for thousands of Palestinian families.

Before concluding, I would like to reiterate Mexico's condemnation of the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories. We call on Israel to cease the expansion of settlements and adopt measures that would reverse the negative trends on the ground, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016). We also call for a definitive suspension of eviction decisions in such East Jerusalem neighbourhoods as Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and Al-Walaja. Decades of conflict have laid bare the disillusionment of the Palestinian population and the imperative need to address the root causes of the conflict.

Finally, I would like to reiterate once again that my country, Mexico, supports the efforts of the international community, including the Middle East Peace Quartet, in favour of the two-State solution, namely, a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and the aspirations of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla's personal participation in today's meeting. We also thank Tor Wennesland for his informative briefing.

We are watching with concern the continued tension in the Palestinian territories, in particular in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The risk remains that clashes in the border areas of Gaza could escalate into full-scale hostilities. There is also the ongoing threat of forced evictions of several Arab families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. On 2 August, the Israeli Supreme Court postponed the hearings in the case indefinitely, which could lead to another round of escalation.

The Russian Federation's position remains unchanged: Israel's illegal settlement activity and expropriation of land and property in the occupied territories is a violation of international law. Such actions significantly impede international efforts aimed at resuming direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations as quickly as possible so as to make sure that the parties arrive at a comprehensive settlement of final status issues.

At the same time, it is impossible to achieve lasting stability without restoring the political horizon and reviving the peace process on the universally agreed

international legal basis, with the two-State solution as the key element.

We also welcome the Egyptian mediation efforts aimed at breaking the deadlock in a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

The prolonged stagnation in the peace process, the provocative unilateral steps and the attempts to score domestic political points through acts of force further complicate the already explosive situation in the conflict area. In that regard, we believe that it is important to preserve and strengthen the international consensus on a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the two-State solution.

The most recent serious escalation of tension in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in May this year once again reminded us of the risks and threats to regional and international security posed by the lack of a settlement. In that context, we call upon the parties concerned to start building a stable and conflict-free Middle East in the spirit of our recently updated concept of collective security in the Gulf region, with an emphasis on its regional dimension. Such a system is meant to be a prelude to building a common post-crisis architecture for the Middle East region.

We support the relaunching of direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, resulting in meeting the legitimate Palestinian aspirations for an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and providing for the understandable Israeli national security concerns. We accord a special role to the Middle East Quartet in helping to achieve that goal as the only internationally recognized mechanism for facilitating an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

In that regard, we intend to continue our efforts to revitalize the activities of the Quartet. We call on our Quartet colleagues to respond positively to our initiative to hold a ministerial meeting in New York in September on the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly, as well as consultations in an expanded format with the participation of States of the region. At the same time, we are counting on the international community's support for such efforts.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Estonia remains committed to supporting efforts to find a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict. As stated many times before, the only viable path towards that is through direct negotiations aimed at a two-State solution based on international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Until the conditions for such negotiations are established, we urge the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take practical steps to rebuild confidence. For instance, further coordinated efforts to enhance economic cooperation are vital and would benefit the citizens of both sides. Meanwhile, it is essential that all refrain from any unilateral steps that undermine the viability of the two-State solution.

We are concerned about the continued tensions around Gaza, and we reiterate our call to the parties to continue to respect the ceasefire and do their utmost to prevent further violence. The continued launching of incendiary balloons, as well the recent launch of a rocket towards Israel, is unacceptable. Israel has a right to defend itself, while ensuring the safety and protection of the civilian population.

Estonia fully supports the international and regional efforts for reconstruction in Gaza and to improve the dire and unsustainable humanitarian and socioeconomic situation on the Gaza Strip. The agreement reached by the United Nations and Qatar on distributing aid to Gaza was a positive step in that regard. We call upon all parties to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access.

Turning to the West Bank, we are worried about the continued incidents of violence, including the recent clashes between the Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and incitement to provocation.

We are concerned about the recent arrests of Palestinian activists calling for transparency in the investigation related to the killing of the political activist Nizar Banat. We call on the Palestinian Authority to ensure freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and to conclude a transparent investigation of the death of Nizar Banat.

We are also concerned about Israel's settlement activity, as well as the evictions and demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank. We call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from advancing such activities, as they are contrary to international law.

In conclusion, considering the tensions on the ground, threatening the stability of Israelis and

Palestinians as well, I would like to reiterate the importance of international and regional efforts supporting the parties to take practical steps to restore confidence, help reconstruction and stabilization in Gaza and create a horizon for meaningful negotiations. It is also essential to resume the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process.

Ms. Miguel (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Let me start by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and endeavours in pursuit of a solution to the ongoing crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, remains one of the most important unresolved issues of peace and security in the world today. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines holds the firm view that multilateral efforts, including those of the Security Council and the Quartet, could contribute to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

During August, Israel, the occupying Power, continued its illegal and inhuman practice throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, injuring and killing Palestinian civilians, including children, in violation of international law. We reiterate our call for immediate international protection for the Palestinian people, in accordance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is also imperative that the relevant parties respect the terms of the 21 May ceasefire agreement in order to prevent a further escalation of violence on the ground.

We remain profoundly concerned about the continuing Israeli demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures in East Jerusalem and areas of the occupied West Bank, displacing Palestinian families. In line with our long-standing position on that issue, we call upon the Israeli authorities to halt the demolition and seizure of Palestinian houses and property, in accordance with its obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law, and to cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion.

The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza remains a source of serious concern. Humanitarian operations continue to be seriously affected by the 14-year Israeli blockade of Gaza, restricting access to humanitarian needs, relief and reconstruction to meet the needs of the people in Gaza. We reiterate our call on Israel to

lift the blockade, which continues to critically affect all aspects of life in Gaza. Moreover, we call on the Security Council to demand that humanitarian aid be allowed to enter Gaza without restrictions.

On the more positive side, we welcome the recent agreement between the United Nations and Qatar to return some Qatari subsidies to Gaza, and we encourage the international community to help alleviate the imminent humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, we reiterate our ongoing urgent call for the international community to continue its support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to fulfil its mandate of providing services to Palestine refugees.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains committed to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with Israel, and a comprehensive peace in the region, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. The Council, with its responsibility for international peace and security mandated by the Charter of the United Nations, cannot afford to ignore the suffering of the Palestinian people anymore. We need to urgently find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the dire conflict.

Mr. Aougi (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

My delegation remains concerned about recent developments in the region, which do not give cause for optimism with regard to our hopes following the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire in May. The incidents observed this month, like those of the previous two months, continue to distance us from those optimistic prospects, leaving behind the looming spectre of violence and instability.

In that regard, we stress that the source of all the violence and suffering endured by these two peoples lies essentially in the continuation of the policy of unbridled colonization carried out by Israel over several decades in the Palestinian territories, in defiance of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Moreover, it is the continuation of colonization, injustice and discrimination against the Palestinian people that breeds discontent, revolt and violence. The tragic events of May and the upsurge in protests in the occupied territories bear witness to that reality and should prompt the Security Council, in line

with its obligations, to do all it can to put an end to that policy.

The international community, the Quartet, the members of the Council and regional actors with influence on the parties must continue to exert the necessary pressure for the maintenance of a lasting ceasefire and the resumption of the peace process for a successful conclusion to this conflict.

On the humanitarian front, my delegation welcomes the reopening of the Rafah crossing by the Egyptian authorities, the easing of the blockade on the import of goods into Gaza by Israel and Qatar's announcement of the forthcoming resumption of its financial aid to thousands of needy families in the enclave.

We therefore call on the international community to be more generous towards the suffering people of Gaza. 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 coronavirus disease pandemic.

As the occupying Power, Israel must fully comply with its responsibilities under international humanitarian law to ensure the well-being and survival of the population under its control.

In conclusion, the Niger reaffirms that only the return to international parameters and the resumption of the peace process leading to the realization of the solution of two viable, sovereign and independent States, living side by side in peace and security, can lead to a lasting solution to the crisis.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): We are happy to see the Foreign Secretary of India presiding over our meeting today, and we thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Kenya hopes that the 20 May ceasefire agreement will continue to hold. However, the recent increase in violent incidents and clashes in the West Bank, as well as the continued tensions this past week in Gaza, including along the perimeter fence, are of concern. If unchecked, such incidents could easily escalate to the levels we saw in May, or even worse.

Kenya strongly condemns the continued rocket launches from Gaza by Hamas and any militant group against civilians and civilian targets in Israel.

We further condemn all terrorist attacks and acts conducive to terrorism by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant groups. We urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from hostilities in the interest of the safety and security of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In the interest of peace and stability in the region, it is critical that the parties commit to upholding the ceasefire and engage positively with the regional stakeholders, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Special Envoys of the Middle East Quartet mediation efforts. Kenya continues to encourage the positive regional mediation efforts, including those aimed at fostering intra-Palestinian unity — particularly following the postponement of the Palestinian presidential elections.

The surge of the coronavirus disease, including reports of the highly infectious Delta variant in the Gaza Strip, is an urgent concern given the already fragile health infrastructure, which has been stretched beyond its capacity. Kenya commends all efforts to contain the spread of the pandemic. It is encouraging that vaccines are now more widely available. We urge a robust effort to promote vaccination that addresses misinformation and disinformation.

Kenya remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We continue to call for unhindered access to humanitarian aid, in line with international humanitarian law. In addition, the existing instruments to guard against the diversion of humanitarian resources by militant groups should be fully operationalized.

We welcome the ongoing efforts for an integrated humanitarian package in Gaza. The recent \$40 million agreement between the Special Coordinator's Office and Qatar for providing funds to families in Gaza is a welcome initiative.

As we look forward to the recommendations of the upcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in September, Kenya continues to call for the strengthened role and reinforced funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to address the broader set of socioeconomic challenges in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As we have stated before, the practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will need to address the various elements that have implications

for peace, security and stability, including the issue of settlements, territorial contiguity and the immediate socioeconomic effects of acts that violate aspects of the resolution.

Kenya therefore remains opposed to the expansion of existing and new settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as they are in violation of international law and constitute a major obstacle to the actualization of the two-State solution.

I conclude by encouraging both Israelis and Palestinians, in every sector and at every level, to spare no effort in promoting direct final-status negotiations as the only meaningful way to achieve sustained peace. We welcome the recent engagements at ministerial levels reported by the Special Coordinator as a positive development in that regard.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Tensions in the occupied Palestinian territory have escalated recently, casting a shadow over the ceasefire agreement reached three months ago. Israeli military forces have clashed with Palestinian demonstrators along the Gaza border on multiple occasions, resulting in many casualties, including dozens of children. Moreover, an arrest operation carried out by the Israeli security forces in the West Bank resulted in the death of several young Palestinians. Special Coordinator Wennesland has called for an investigation in that regard.

China is deeply concerned about those developments and urges all parties, especially Israel, to exercise maximum restraint, avoid all violence against civilians and refrain from any actions that might heighten tensions. We call on Israel to fully abide by all relevant United Nations resolutions, halt settlement activities in the West Bank and cease the demolition of Palestinian homes and the expulsion of Palestinians.

The dual shock of conflict and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. The international community should take urgent action to provide Palestine with humanitarian and COVID-19 response assistance through multiple channels and continue to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

China welcomes Qatar's cooperation with the United Nations to provide relief to the people of Gaza. We urge Israel to open relevant entry points, lift the blockade and siege on Gaza as soon as possible and provide access for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction materials rather than setting up obstacles.

China has been following closely the humanitarian situation in Palestine and has provided concrete support to the Palestinian people's fight against the pandemic. In March, the Chinese Government donated 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Palestine and will donate another 1 million doses in the near future. In addition, China will partner with Egypt to provide the Palestinians in Gaza with 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine supplied from an Egypt-based vaccine field facility, jointly built by the two countries. We will also provide 200,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to UNRWA.

The frequent conflicts between Palestine and Israel are largely due to the fact that the Middle East peace process has deviated from the right track, that relevant United Nations resolutions have not been effectively implemented and Palestine's right to statehood has been repeatedly violated. That proves once again that a lasting settlement of the Palestine-Israel question lies in the two-State solution.

During a visit to the Middle East last month, the State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi, put forward three ideas on implementing the two-State solution with a view to breaking the current impasse and translating the consensus on the two-State solution into concrete action. China calls for enhancing the authority of the Palestinian National Authority, supports intra-Palestinian unity and reconciliation and encourages Palestine and Israel to resume peace talks based on the two-State solution. Palestinian and Israeli negotiators are welcome to conduct direct talks in China. China also calls for the holding of a United Nations-led international peace conference that brings together the permanent members of the Security Council and all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process.

As a sincere friend of the Palestinian people, China supports Palestine's just calls for fighting for its national rights and the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian State based on his 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will continue to work with the international community

to preserve peace and justice, uphold fairness and conscience, practice true multilateralism and promote a comprehensive, reasonable and just settlement of the Palestinian question, as well as the early realization of lasting peace in Palestine, Israel and the wider region.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I welcome you, Foreign Secretary, to the Security Council table. I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing. The fact is that we should all be concerned by the rising tensions between Israel and the Gaza Strip over recent weeks and, the comprehensive briefing of Tor Wennesland just reinforces that view. The fragility of the ceasefire underlines — as if those of us at this meeting needed reminding — the urgent need to address the root causes of that conflict.

The high number of casualties, including children, from recent violence at protests along the Gaza border are unacceptable, and we also strongly condemn the release of incendiary balloons from Gaza. We have already this year seen the devastating loss of many lives, including the deaths of children in Gaza and Israel. In addition, 13 children have been killed in the West Bank so far this year as a result of that conflict, many by live fire from Israeli security forces. We expect the Israeli Government to hold perpetrators of those killings to account and to conduct transparent investigations to that end. There is a clear risk of an even more severe escalation, and today we urge all sides to exercise restraint and to uphold rules of international humanitarian law applicable to children in armed conflict.

We welcome the recent positive developments, including the agreement to distribute Qatari aid payments to vulnerable families in Gaza through the United Nations. The situation in Gaza remains dire, marked by alarming unemployment and poverty rates, increased food insecurity and an inadequate health service to tackle the challenges posed by the pandemic. Without the hope of a better future for Gazans, especially for young people in Gaza, we cannot hope to resolve those issues in a sustainable way.

It is imperative that Gazans be given such hope and that reconstruction and recovery move forward without delay. I reiterate our appeal to international donors to step up support, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I would like also to underline the necessity of full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access into

Gaza. The positive steps that we have seen in recent days must be expedited and expanded. I repeat Ireland's call on Israel to end its illegal blockade, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Time and again, Council members have expressed support for the development of a sustainable and sovereign Palestinian State. To make that possible, we must keep alive the viability of a two-State solution.

Ireland repeats its call on Israel to end all settlement expansion, in line with international law. We remain very concerned about the impact of settlements and increasing reports of settler violence on Palestinian communities. We call for attacks against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory to cease immediately and for those responsible to be clearly held to account.

Demolitions, including in Humsa Al-Baqai'a and Ras Al-Tin last month, as well as threatened evictions of Palestinian families from their homes, including in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, Al-Walaja and elsewhere in the West Bank, are part of a deeply concerning trend of displacement of Palestinians, which simply must cease. We reject any attempts to undermine the status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem, which will only further fuel tensions on the ground.

Ireland encourages the Quartet to renew its efforts to revive the Middle East peace process. We also recognize the importance of holding Palestinian elections across the occupied territory, giving a democratic voice to Palestinians, redoubling efforts to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation and renewing the legitimacy of national institutions.

We will continue to say it: It is essential that Palestinian women be supported in respect of their right to full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of public and political life. That should be guaranteed. We all have a responsibility in seeing that be realized.

The arrest and intimidation of human rights defenders and activists for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association is unacceptable. Denying them the right to peaceful assembly is also completely unacceptable. We call on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to protect and uphold those fundamental rights.

Finally, after decades of strife and loss of life, we all know that the underlying causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved only by ending

the illegal occupation, which began in 1967. It can be realized only through a two-State solution, the parameters of which are well known and are agreed. That would see an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State side by side in peace and security with Israel. It is in the interests of both peoples.

Notwithstanding the obstacles, that will and must remain our vision and our shared goal, as we

have already set out in numerous United Nations resolutions, in the work of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

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 of the subject in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at noon.