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meeting

Tuesday, 21 December 2021, 10.20 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Abarry.	(Niger)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	India	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Ndung'u
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Gonsalves
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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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

The President (*spoke in French*): 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: I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the twentieth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The written report of the Secretary-General that members of the Security Council have already received covers the period from 29 September and 9 December.

Before turning to developments that have taken place since the submission of the written report, I would like to express my continued concern about recent developments in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in particular the deteriorating security situation. Clashes, attacks, military operations, including in Area A, and high levels of settler-related violence have continued, alongside calls by Palestinian militant factions for increased confrontations with Israel.

Continued unilateral steps, including Israeli settlement advancement, evictions and demolitions, and the severe fiscal and economic crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory are further exacerbating the situation and undermining the institutional stability of the Palestinian Authority. If left unchecked, I am concerned that not only may the situation in the West Bank further deteriorate, but the dynamics could also impact the security situation in Gaza and undermine the cessation of hostilities in place since 21 May. It is crucial that all parties take immediate steps to lower tensions and restore calm.

Violent incidents have, unfortunately, continued throughout the occupied territories. Overall, since 29 September, 12 Palestinians, including one woman

and four children, have been killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis and other incidents across the occupied Palestinian territory; and 306 Palestinians, including three women and 53 children, have been injured, including 16 by live ammunition. Thirty-nine Palestinians, including four children, have been injured by Israeli settlers or other civilians, who have also perpetrated 121 attacks, resulting in damage to Palestinian property.

In all, two Israeli civilians have been killed and 39 Israelis — 30 civilians, including two women and two children, and nine members of the Israeli security forces — injured by Palestinians in clashes and shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks, as well as incidents involving the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents. Palestinians have perpetrated 105 attacks resulting in damage to Israeli property.

On 10 December, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israel security forces during clashes near the town of Beita in the West Bank, near Nablus. The man was the ninth Palestinian fatality in the same area this year since protests began in May in the vicinity of Beita against the neighbouring Evyatar settlement outpost, which was partly evacuated in July. On 12 December, clashes erupted in Aida camp, Bethlehem, between Hamas supporters and Palestinian security forces during a celebration for a released prisoner. Two Palestinian officers were injured by an explosive device.

On 13 December, Israeli security forces conducted a search-and-arrest operation in Nablus, which was followed by an exchange of fire with armed Palestinians. One Palestinian man was killed and two others were injured in unclear circumstances. Later that day, a general strike took place in Nablus to protest the incident. Clashes between Palestinian security forces and other armed Palestinians were reported during the man's funeral.

On 16 December, a 25-year-old Israeli was shot and killed by armed Palestinians near the evacuated settlement of Homesh, near Nablus. Two other Israelis were injured in the attack. On 17 December, settlers entered the village of Qaryut, south of Nablus, severely beat a Palestinian man and damaged property. On 19 December, Israeli security forces arrested six Palestinians in the village of Silat Al-Harithiya, near Jenin, on suspicion of involvement in the shooting.

On 19 December, hundreds of settlers attempted to enter the Homesh outpost and set up illegal structures, breaking through Israeli security forces barricades and using violence against Israeli soldiers, including hitting one soldier with a vehicle. On 20 December, Israeli Minister of Defence Benny Gantz condemned violent acts by Israelis against Palestinians and Israeli security forces, saying that such attacks would not be accepted or tolerated.

Some affirmative steps have been taken since the submission of the written report. On 11 December, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission conducted the first round of local council elections in several hundred small communities in the West Bank, with more than 66 per cent of eligible voters participating. More than 25 per cent of the candidates were women, with nine heading electoral lists. Their representation in the local councils will amount to some 22 per cent, close to the minimum legal requirement for at least two seats per council.

On 12 December, the Central Elections Commission announced the start of preparations for a second round of municipal elections in the larger West Bank communities and all local councils in Gaza, set for 26 March. On 14 December, United States and Palestinian officials met virtually to renew the United States-Palestinian economic dialogue — the first such meeting in five years.

I will now turn to several observations concerning the implementation of the provision of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period. Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply concerning, particularly the consideration of advancements of plans in highly controversial areas crucial to the continuity of a future Palestinian State, including in E-1, Atarot and Givat Hamatos.

Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, and I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activities immediately. I remain concerned about the potential eviction of a number of families from homes that they have lived in for decades in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of occupied East Jerusalem. I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and approve plans that would

enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs.

In this context, I welcome the advancement of plans for several thousand housing units for Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Al-Isawiya and Area C. I urge Israel to continue regularly advancing such plans and to issue building permits for all previously approved plans for Palestinians in area C and East Jerusalem.

The continuing violence, incitement to violence and attacks against civilians, including acts of terrorism and sexual-related violence exacerbate mistrust and undermine a peaceful resolution to the conflict. There can be no justification for such acts, which must be condemned by all. I reiterate that the violence must stop and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

The deterioration of the security and socioeconomic situations across the occupied Palestinian territory is deeply worrying and the situation must be reversed. It is essential that the parties avoid unilateral steps that change the realities on the ground, reducing flashpoints and violence across the occupied Palestinian territory. Concerted efforts by all parties — more than we have seen to date — are required to maintain calm, strengthen Palestinian institutions and restore hope. Furthermore, steps by all parties are urgently needed to shore up the economic and institutional stability of the Palestinian Authority, including through the implementation of needed reforms.

I note that the situation in Gaza also remains fragile. While constructive measures initiated during the reporting period are encouraging, further steps are required to solidify the cessation of hostilities and meet the needs of the population in the Strip. For any durable stability, movement and access in and out of the Strip must be improved with a view to the full lifting of the closures in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

I also note the high turnout in the 11 December municipal elections, echoing the level of public engagement leading to the campaign period for planned elections earlier this year. I look forward to the second round of local council elections on 26 March and encourage all parties to respond positively to calls by the Central Elections Commission to allow local elections across the occupied Palestinian territory, including in Gaza.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the rising level of violence we have seen in recent weeks should be a clear warning to us all. If left unaddressed, the festering conflict drivers described in my briefing today and in the latest written report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will drag us into yet another destructive and bloody round of violence. We must act now to prevent that from happening.

Strengthening the Palestinian Authority is critical to maintaining stability on the ground. Financial support is essential, but not enough. I urge positive steps from all parties and necessary reforms that increase the Palestinian Authority's ability to deliver for the Palestinian people. At the same time, negative actions that undermine its authority need to stop.

This has been a year of significant shifts in the political context affecting the conflict, resulting in one of the most challenging set of circumstances to face the Palestinian Authority since its establishment. Nevertheless, I look ahead to next year with the determination that we will find opportunities to reverse the negative trajectories and work towards constructive engagement by the parties, with the support of the international community, to restore the political horizon.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in resolving the conflict and ending the occupation through the achievement of a two-State solution in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. We will continue our intensive engagement with the parties, the Middle East Quartet and regional and international partners to advance that goal.

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

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

Mr. Mills (United States of America): As always, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his very useful and informative briefing.

The United States is also deeply concerned about rising tensions in the West Bank and in and around Jerusalem, especially violence perpetrated against ordinary civilians attempting to go about their lives as best they can. We urge the authorities to condemn

acts of violence and also to respond to attacks in a proportionate and reasonable manner that seeks to avoid the unnecessary loss of life. Such episodes risk precipitating an even greater escalation of violence.

We call on Israelis and Palestinians to refrain from any actions that would add to the already tense situation we have just heard about and that would undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-State solution. Those actions include demolitions, settlement expansion, the eviction of families from homes in which they have lived for generations, incitement to violence and providing compensation for individuals in prison for acts of terrorism.

We also call on the authorities to hold those responsible for violence fully accountable for their actions. All perpetrators should face equal justice under the law.

Israeli and Palestinian civil society members have an important role to play in promoting peace. Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield met with civil society leaders in Ramallah and was, frankly, inspired by their work to advance democracy, human rights and economic opportunity for the Palestinian people. We also support the roles of Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations alike in monitoring human rights abuses, wherever they occur.

Let me also take note of Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan's welcome of Israeli Prime Minister Bennett to the United Arab Emirates last week. It demonstrated that good faith engagement can build confidence and create a path of cooperation towards achieving security, prosperity and dignity for every Israeli and every Palestinian. We look forward to working with the United Arab Emirates when it joins the Council next month, in addition to new members Albania, Brazil, Gabon and Ghana.

The United States remains committed to widening the circle of peace between Israel and its neighbours and expanding normalization agreements. We encourage all those who look for peace in the Middle East to commit to constructive acts that helped the Palestinians and Israelis to coexist and prosper.

While the United States has contributed more than \$318 million in the fiscal year 2021 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to help Palestinians in need, we are deeply concerned that the Agency is once again

facing an immediate financial shortfall. We note the broad support of Member States for the work of the Agency, most recently expressed during the Human Rights Council briefing to the Council and during the General Assembly's humanitarian debate.

We thank those Member States contributing to UNRWA, including Qatar and Kuwait, for their recent generosity in that regard. We renew our call for all Member States to provide financial contributions to UNRWA as we work towards a financially sustainable Agency that effectively delivers on its mandate and operates in line with humanitarian principles.

Finally, if I may, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the year, I would like to congratulate, on behalf of the United States delegation, the Nigerien presidency. It was a very successful presidency during a very challenging month. I would also like to bid, on behalf of the United States delegation, a fond farewell to our outgoing colleagues: Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam. They and their teams have been strong and effective colleagues on the Council over the past two years and the United States delegation looks forward to continuing our close work with each of them after they leave the Council.

I will conclude by quoting from the final line of one of the great American plays of the twentieth century. When you speak of this experience — and you will — please “remember to be kind”.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East. It will not be possible to achieve an overall improvement in the situation in the Middle East region without resolving the Palestinian question. As demonstrated by the voting in the General Assembly this past November and December on the annual thematic resolutions, the vast majority of the international community is united in its commitment to a just solution to the Palestinian question.

With no prospect of an imminent relaunch of the peace process, that focal point of repeated tensions will continue to generate sporadic violence. The escalation in May in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and predominantly Arab areas of Israel are clear examples of that. We view with concern the recurring outbursts of confrontation in the Old City of Jerusalem, which have resulted in injuries and casualties. We call

on the parties to show restraint and refrain from taking drastic steps.

The situation is complicated by unilateral actions — the appropriation and destruction of Palestinian property, the construction of settlements, arbitrary arrests, violation of the status of holy sites and incitement to violence. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) provides some very disheartening statistics in that regard. We are particularly concerned about the Israeli leadership's plans, announced in mid-October, to resume, after a brief pause, building illegal settlements in the West Bank, as well as to double the number of the settlers in the Jordan Valley by 2026.

We call on the parties to resume the peace process on a universally recognized international legal basis that includes the two-State solution. That requires renouncing provocations and unilateral steps that create irreversible facts on the ground.

Overcoming the intra-Palestinian division within the Palestine Liberation Organization remains an important condition for emerging from the crisis. For our part, we maintain our intention to hold the next joint meeting in Moscow as soon as leading Palestinian political forces and movements are ready to agree on common approaches and formalize them in the relevant document. We are counting on the assistance of other interested parties, particularly our friends in Egypt.

We continue to work with the Palestinians and the Israelis and with the international and regional actors concerned, including within the Middle East Quartet. A month after Prime Minister Bennett's visit to Russia, President Putin met with President Abbas in Sochi on 23 November. In principle, we support the initiative of the Palestinian President to hold an international conference on the Palestinian question. We intend to continue working actively with our Quartet partners, whose most recent teleconference took place on 10 December. Our initiatives to improve the effectiveness of that mediation mechanism are well known and remain on the table.

We believe that it is important to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance to those in need in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. Following the escalation in violence in May, maintaining the ceasefire and providing humanitarian assistance to

affected Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip, are of the utmost importance.

In that regard, we support the efforts of the relevant international organizations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). At an international conference held in Brussels on 16 November in support of the Agency, Russia announced its intention to continue its funding, which involves annual voluntary contributions to the Agency's budget over the next five years. We believe that it is crucial that UNRWA continue its comprehensive work to provide humanitarian assistance to the millions of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East without hindrance.

In conclusion, given that this is the last official meeting of the Security Council this year, we would like to thank you, Mr. President, and all the delegation of the Niger for your high-level presidency of the Council in December. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the delegations of the Niger, Viet Nam, Tunisia, Estonia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for their close engagement in the Security Council during their two-year tenures, including on the issue under consideration today.

Mr. Ndung'u (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his overview and observations during this reporting period. We welcome his 17 December call in response to the recent escalating violence in the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. As outlined in the report, those tragic incidents are claiming both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Kenya continues to strongly condemn that and other terror attacks and shootings, which Hamas and other militant groups continue to laud and claim, including the November shooting in Jerusalem's Old City and the fatal shooting in the West Bank last week. We reiterate that no cause can justify the deliberate targeting of civilians. Such acts of terror must cease.

Kenya urges all political, religious and community leaders from both sides to speak up. Beyond speaking up, we urge all leaders, young and old, to demonstrate the daily dividends of constructive grass-roots efforts in practically and consistently mitigating against cycles of conflict.

As Kenya has stated before, the practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will need to address the issues of settlements, territorial contiguity and the viability of the 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.

While the quarterly reports remain essential in keeping the Security Council informed in terms of numbers and trends, breaking the cycle of conflict will take much more. There is a need to have updates on the actual efforts and operationalization mechanisms, or lack thereof, to address all violations of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), including efforts to combat terrorism and all acts of violence against civilians. The parties have a particular responsibility in that regard, and there is a need for accountability.

It has been five years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). There is very little to show in terms of implementation. For decades, we have been talking about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, and rightfully so. However, the actual elements of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacebuilding seem to always be a catch-up or reactionary endeavour. Kenya welcomes the focus in the current report on the important trends in 2021 that need the Security Council's urgent attention, including settler expansion, demolitions and the issuance of housing tenders. That said, in view of paragraph 11 of resolution 2334 (2016), in which the Security Council affirms its determination to examine practical ways and means to ensure the full implementation of its relevant resolutions, we urge for a deeper analysis that also focuses on the correlation and contextualization of those incidents and their short- and long-term implications for the implementation of the Middle East peace process normative framework, which includes resolution 2334 (2016).

Such a call for the report to be analytical is not aimed at criticism or animating discussions. It is an effort to salvage resolution 2334 (2016). It is an approach that we believe will provide a workable framework that will safeguard the achievements to date and 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.

Additionally, as the needed focus is being directed on Gaza, we must not lose sight of the security and economic challenges in the West Bank. We take note of the successful completion, on 11 December, of the first phase of municipal elections in the West Bank.

Kenya also welcomes the United States-Palestinian economic dialogue the first such senior-level meeting in five years. We look forward to implementable outcomes.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing, which reminds us that only a two-State solution, with two States living in peace and security within recognized borders along the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as their capital, will make it possible to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and to guarantee the security of all.

This solution has been defined by international law, the agreed parameters and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Only the implementation of that framework will allow for a just and lasting peace in the region. It is on this realistic basis that France and its European partners continue to support the two-State solution.

The facts are clear. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) five years ago did not prevent the continued settlement. Over the recent period, the positive trend of recent months has been jeopardized by unilateral actions. The first of these was the increase in Israeli announcements concerning settlements after months of standstill. The decision of the Israeli authorities to temporarily suspend the creation of a new settlement in Atarot offers a reprieve, but that project must be permanently abandoned. I recall that if it were implemented, it would constitute, as with Givat Hamatos, the creation of a new settlement in East Jerusalem for the first time in 25 years. France is also concerned about plans to expand Area E-1.

Settlement runs counter to international law and only makes the prospect of a peaceful resolution of the conflict more distant. France will not recognize any change to the 1967 lines other than those agreed upon by the parties. All States must distinguish in their exchanges between the territory of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967.

Secondly, this year again, the number of demolitions and evictions has reached record levels. Settler violence against Palestinians is increasing. The current escalation in the Palestinian territories is worrisome. We deplore any loss of life and welcome the determination of the Israeli authorities to combat settler extremism. We recall that Israel must ensure the protection of all civilians, including Palestinians, under international law. It must also ensure the proportionate

use of force by its security forces and that those responsible for crimes are brought to justice.

Thirdly, the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as terrorist organizations constitutes a further narrowing of the space for civil society in Palestine. These designations, which concern one NGO that received the Human Rights Prize of the French Republic in 2018, are very worrisome.

Finally, we call on the Palestinian Authority to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the territories under its control, as well as to strengthen Palestinian democratic governance. We are concerned by the backsliding of recent months. The holding of municipal elections in December recalls the importance of general elections in renewing the democratic legitimacy of institutions. Strong democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law, are indeed essential for a viable Palestinian State.

In that light, the international community must act to reverse the current trend. This means, first of all, strengthening the ceasefire in Gaza and enhancing the humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts. France commends the essential work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and calls for a surge of donors to enable it to pay its December salaries. The measures taken by Israel to foster the development of the Palestinian territories must be furthered.

Lastly, it is essential to restore a political perspective for the resumption of negotiations between the parties. This is why France is determined to work with its partners for concrete and reciprocal measures aimed at building trust between the parties. We will continue our efforts within the framework of the Amman group, as well as with the Security Council and the Quartet, so that they play an active role.

Before I conclude, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council during December, although the month is not over yet. I would also like to warmly thank the five non-permanent members of the Council that will be leaving us on 31 December for the outstanding work they have done over the past two years.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of France for his kind words.

Ms. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I too would like to thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing.

A resolution of the matter before us this morning is long overdue. The suffering of Palestinians and the injustice meted out for decades are etched into the hearts and minds of many people. Recently, we saw football fans display their solidarity with the just Palestinian cause at the Arab Cup, held in Qatar. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to stand in solidarity with the State of Palestine in support of international law and is mindful that the world is watching and losing faith in the Security Council and our rules-based international order for failing to uphold the very rules that we adopt.

We have repeatedly reaffirmed the vision of a two-State solution based on pre-1967 borders, with Palestinians and Israelis living peacefully side by side. This is, indeed, a vision backed by international law, resolution 2334 (2016) and numerous other resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. We emphasize again the need for Israel to end its aggression, occupation and annexation. The lack of progress towards the two-State solution is, quite frankly, egregious.

We need to address the following issues with urgency: the escalation of hostilities in the West Bank and Gaza; forced displacement through home demolitions; undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association throughout the occupied Palestinian territory; extrajudicial killings of Palestinians; settler violence; the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on Palestinians; and the situation of Palestinian refugees.

This month marks five years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). Since then, as we have heard and as we all know, the situation on the ground has only deteriorated, owing to Israel's non-compliance with its obligations. Yet again, we reiterate that the establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. Furthermore, the continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures are also deeply concerning, and we condemn these acts. These practices must stop. It is time for the Security Council to take practical steps towards ending the occupation and realizing a negotiated two-State solution.

We remain very concerned about the very fragile situation in Gaza. Now more than ever, humanitarian and economic support is needed to support the most vulnerable communities. As we are aware, the 14-year siege on Gaza continues to devastate its economy, restrict the movement of people and limit the provision of basic services, including electricity, affecting medical services and hospital operations.

We therefore reiterate our call for the Israeli authorities to lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip so as to allow for the reconstruction of Gaza in its entirety.

The plight of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East is also dire. The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is worsening, with December salaries for staff — most of whom are refugees themselves — hanging in the balance and with refugees facing a stark reduction in services. We commend donors who are committed to supporting UNRWA and call for timely and predictable funding to allow the Agency to conduct its vital work.

Further, as previously discussed, we remain deeply concerned about the Israeli designation of six civil society organizations as terrorist groups. Before making my closing remarks, I would also like to take note of the recent virtual meeting between the United States and the Palestinian Authority in order to discuss economic matters. That engagement must, of course, be grounded in international law and support the two-State solution. We welcome all engagements to that end.

As this is the final statement my delegation will make as an elected member of the Security Council and, indeed, for the month of December, I wish to commend you, Ambassador Abarry, for the manner in which you and your team have led the Council this month, with the assistance of the Security Council Affairs Division. For our part, it has been an honour and a privilege for my team and I to work with everyone on the Council over the past two years on a professional and personal level.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for her kind words of farewell.

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

I share the deep concern of the Special Coordinator and the Security Council members over the continued

violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This year, the number of Palestinians killed by the use of force in the West Bank alone is three times that of 2020 and 2019, and the rate of injuries has been even higher. Settler-related attacks remain a major concern, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report.

We call on all parties, especially the relevant Israeli authorities, to spare no effort to reverse that trend. Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of protection. Israeli security forces must exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from the excessive use of force. Given the volatility of the current situation, it is urgent for all those in power to reject violence. Attacks, clashes and incitement to violence will only exacerbate mistrust and push all sides deeper into the cycle of conflict.

When resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted, it constituted a major achievement of the Council, and there was strong hope that it would be a breakthrough in the question of Palestine. However, now five years after its adoption, no progress has been made.

On the contrary, the situation has even worsened. The prospect of a just, sustainable and comprehensive settlement of the conflict now seems less promising than it was in 2016. The negative trends on the ground have continued, with more settlement expansions, demolitions, evictions and violence. Day by day, those trends have undermined the hope for a two-State solution, despite the fact that such a solution has the overwhelming support of the international community, including all 15 of the current members of the Council.

We have stressed on many occasions that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions and systematically erode the possibility of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. It is not the lack of a legal framework but the lack of implementation that is hindering the settlement of the conflict. We believe that the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) remains the only way forward, and there is no viable alternative.

The security of Israel must be respected, but it is in Israel's security interests to implement resolution 2334 (2016), along with the other relevant United Nations resolutions. Settlement activities and the use of force against hopeless and disadvantaged Palestinians, in disregard of international law and United Nations

resolutions, will never bring about lasting peace. It will only ignite more violence.

While we welcome the recent exchanges and cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian officials, we believe that significant progress will require further concrete steps from both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet is expected to have a strong role in advancing the peace process. We also support all initiatives put forward by members of the international community in that direction. At the same time, we highly commend all humanitarian efforts from non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and international actors to help Palestinians in need.

We are saddened by the lack of progress in the Palestinian question. Viet Nam will no longer be on the Council next year, but our hope and commitment remain strong. We will continue our unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights and the establishment of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, peacefully coexisting alongside the State of Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders based on the pre-1967 lines and the negotiated settlement and in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Finally, since this is the last open meeting of the Security Council for 2021, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Nigerien delegation, particularly Ambassador Abarry and his team, for their successful presidency of the Council for the month of December. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all members of the Security Council in 2020 and 2021 and all States Members of the United Nations for the close cooperation and valuable support they have provided us during the past two years. We look forward to working with one and all on issues of common interest in the years to come.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Viet Nam for his kind words.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing on the Secretary-General's detailed twentieth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The report highlights worrying trends across the region, including an increasing level of violence and incitement to violence across a number of fronts. We call on all parties to condemn incitement wherever and whenever it occurs. Just last week, we were horrified to see the attacks on three Israeli citizens near Nablus, in which a young man lost his life. Our hearts go out to the family of Yehuda Dimentman. We fully support Israel's right to ensure its security and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The report also highlights the acute risks to stability facing the region and the need to ease tensions. Those include the immediate financial crises facing both the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the rising tension in East Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah following a number of violent attacks and an increase in settler violence against Palestinians. We call on all parties to urge calm and prevent this cycle of violence.

The United Kingdom continues to urge the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The plans to advance construction in E-1 and the demolitions and evictions affecting the Palestinian populations in East Jerusalem and Area C directly threaten the viability of a future Palestinian State. The threat of eviction facing residents in Sheikh Jarrah also risks further violence and instability.

We welcome the decision by the Jerusalem District Planning Committee to postpone the decision to construct housing units in Atarot beyond the 1967 lines. We urge the Israeli authorities not to move forward with these plans.

We must not forget the toll this prolonged conflict has taken on the people of Gaza. As our Minister for the Middle East set out on 17 December, the United Kingdom is proud to have provided \$2.6 million to UNICEF to launch its child-sensitive cash-assistance programme in Gaza to help vulnerable households, especially children, gain access to basic services.

We do welcome the positive progress made this year to improve relations between the parties and encourage dialogue at the senior ministerial level. We encourage further progress in this regard. We hope economic cooperation will continue to develop, building on the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in November and, we hope,

through a meeting of the Joint Economic Committee early next year.

As we look towards a new calendar year, we urge a continuation of increased dialogue between the parties and a reversal of the negative trends we have heard about today. It is only through dialogue that we can improve stability across the region and build the foundations for peace. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to a two-State solution based on 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, may I join others in thanking you and the Niger as you assumed the presidency during this busy month, and to our colleagues and their teams from Estonia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam for their time on the Council. Dag Hammarskjöld reminded us that we are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny, but what we put in it is ours. My departing colleagues' time on the Council has been remarkable.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for her kind words.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I thank Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing and for the report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

As the Security Council convenes to discuss the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory for the final time this year, five years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), it is fitting that we take stock. Despite grave concerns raised in the Council about Israel's settlement activity in every meeting this year, Israel has continued to plan and expand its settlements, with an estimated 800,000 people now housed in illegal settlements.

I repeat Ireland's call on Israel to halt all settlement activity, including in the sensitive areas of E-1, Atarot and Givat Hamatos. The facts are crystal clear: settlements are illegal under international law and severely undermine the viability of a two-State solution. Ireland assures the Security Council of its commitment to the principle of differentiation and the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The year 2021 has also seen a record-high number of Palestinians affected by demolitions, evictions and confiscations. Once again, Palestinian families in Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Walaja are confronted with a looming legal deadline. In East Jerusalem alone,

121 children have been affected by demolitions and confiscations this year. As highlighted by the Secretary-General, demolitions and forced evictions raise serious concerns about the risk of forcible transfer.

The significant uptick in violence across the occupied Palestinian territory this year — as well as its increasing intensity — is extremely concerning. Incidents of settler violence are deeply disturbing, and those responsible for attacks must be held accountable. In 2021, the Israeli security forces in the West Bank killed 72 Palestinians, including 17 children, using live ammunition. The disproportionate use of live fire by the Israeli security forces is unacceptable. We are deeply disturbed by the surge in violence in the West Bank, including attacks in Jerusalem and the killing of civilians. We condemn terrorism in all its forms. We are concerned by the threat to the safety and security of Palestinian and Israeli populations and by incitement to violence by terrorist groups.

Earlier this year, we witnessed the most significant escalation in hostilities since 2014, leading to the death of more than 200 people, including over 60 children. Seven months on, the ceasefire remains fragile. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has confirmed that more than half of the children in the Gaza Strip require mental-health support. Every child is born with the right to safety, the right to protection and the right to development. For Palestinian children, these rights are violated on a daily basis.

Our statement here last month (see S/PV.8913) made our position of grave concern clear on Israel's recent designation of six Palestinian civil society organizations. Ireland's commitment to supporting civil society and those defending human rights remains unwavering.

We welcome the first phase of Palestinian municipal elections in the West Bank and look forward to the second phase. Ireland remains of the view that national Palestinian elections are essential to renewing the legitimacy of national institutions. The financial situation of the Palestinian Authority is of concern, and we encourage support and enhanced economic cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

We strongly support UNRWA's vital work for Palestine refugees and call on others to do the same and to ensure that UNRWA has the financial means

to fully discharge its role, which is also critical to regional stability.

Let me emphasize again the need to reinvigorate efforts, including through the Quartet, with and between the parties and with key regional players, to help make progress towards a two-State solution to the conflict. Only this will end the occupation and achieve our shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

The Security Council also bears a particular responsibility, given its role in the maintenance of international peace and security under the United Nations Charter and the fact that this issue has been on the United Nations agenda since 1948. Ireland is ready to play its part, and this issue will remain a priority for the rest of our membership in the Council.

As this is the last official meeting of the year, I wanted to take this opportunity to say a most sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to your team, for the stellar way in which you have led us through your final month on the Security Council. I also wanted to say a fond farewell to the other departing colleagues from Estonia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam. If I may respond to the beautiful prose of the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom, I would like to end with a quotation — of course, from an Irish poet, W. B. Yeats — who said,

“Think where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends.”

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Ireland for her kind words and for sharing her Irish wisdom.

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

Estonia shares the concerns about escalated tensions in the West Bank, which have led to an increasingly volatile situation. We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks and violence against civilians, including the deadly shooting near Nablus last Thursday. We are also concerned about the increased settler-related violence. We call on all parties to refrain from violence incitement and acts of provocation.

Secondly, we remain worried about the continued Israeli settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions, as such acts are contrary to international law. While

we note the recent decision of the Israeli authorities to postpone the approval of a plan for some 9,000 settlement units in Atarot, we urge Israel to permanently halt all settlement plans in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The report of the Secretary-General mentions another worrying trend — the increase in restrictions by Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including arbitrary detentions. We call on the Palestinian authorities to ensure freedom of expression of human rights defenders and protesters and ensure the protection of the witnesses in the trial for Nizar Banat's killing. We also take seriously the listing of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations by the Israeli authorities. Civil society enjoying fundamental freedoms is essential to democracy and to promoting peace and efforts between Israelis and Palestinians.

On a positive note, we recognize the increased contacts between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Hopefully, these will be followed by more practical steps, including those aimed at improving the economic and institutional stability of the Palestinian Authority.

Thirdly, we welcome the holding of the first phase of Palestinian municipal elections on 11 December. Hopefully, that will soon be followed by a second phase in the rest of the municipalities, as well as national elections. We hope to see the resumption of the efforts towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which also remains vital to reaching a sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Turning to Gaza, we positively note the recent steps taken by Israel to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods to Gaza and call for additional improvements to allowing movement in and out of Gaza, while taking into account Israel's security concerns.

I would like once more to call on the parties to refrain from unilateral steps undermining the two-State solution and instead to take practical steps towards improving cooperation. I would also like to commend Special Coordinator Wennesland for his continued efforts, together with key international partners, to create favourable conditions for the resumption of meaningful negotiations.

Before I finish, Sir, I would first like to congratulate and thank you and the Niger for an excellent presidency

during the month of December. As this is, hopefully, my last official meeting as a member of the Security Council, I would like to also take this opportunity to thank Ms. Hasmik Egian, her team and the Secretariat for the excellent help and cooperation that we have had during the past two years, and all my colleagues on the Council — both elected and permanent members — for really making us feel like part of the family. I use that word sincerely. Although we have sometimes not seen eye to eye, I really appreciate the personal relations that we have had here, and it has been an honour and great experience to serve in the Council. When we leave the Council, I promise that we will be guided by the same principles and that we will continue to work towards making this a better and safer world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Estonia for his statement and kind words.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I take this opportunity to reiterate Tunisia's appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator to promote peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council's resolutions continue not to be implemented and the parties concerned not to be compelled to uphold them, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations. That is the main reason why the situation in the Middle East remains hostage to tensions and instability, thereby prolonging more than seven decades of occupation accompanied by killings, displacement and repression of Palestinians and the violation of their most basic rights, without arriving at a solution for the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general.

The Secretary-General's report notes the scope of the violations committed by the occupation authorities against this resolution 2334 (2016). They insist on pursuing their aggressive practices against Palestinian citizens in the occupied territories without any sense of accountability, demonstrating yet again how the occupation forces ignore the resolutions of international legitimacy.

It has been five years since resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted, along with dozens of previous resolutions and international and regional initiatives. Since

then, there has been no progress in terms of ceasing settlement activities, the seizure of land and the demolition of homes; halting measures to change the demographic nature and legal and historic status of the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967, including East Jerusalem; stopping violence against civilians; or resuming negotiations pursuant to resolutions of international legitimacy and the agreed terms of reference.

In view of the flagrant violations of the rights of the Palestinian people by the occupying Power, Tunisia calls once again on the international community and the Security Council to fully shoulder their responsibilities and ensure that the occupying Power upholds its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We reiterate the need to protect Palestinian civilians from the violence perpetrated by the settlers and the occupation forces, which use excessive force, including against women and children. Defenceless Palestinian civilians are repeatedly attacked. Restrictions are being imposed upon their freedom of expression and organization. Palestinian civil society organizations are targeted, including six that have been classified as terrorist organizations.

How long will this situation of violence and escalation last as a result of the occupation practices, such as those carried out in May? We must confront the root causes of the situation, namely, the occupation.

There can be no security and stability in the region without a just and comprehensive peace that restores the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and enables them to enjoy their liberty and dignity in an independent sovereign State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. The terms of reference of such a solution are well-known. There are numerous United Nations resolutions to that effect. International efforts must now be made to ensure that those resolutions are upheld and implemented in order to launch serious, credible and time-bound negotiations to arrive at a just and comprehensive settlement.

In that regard, we reiterate Tunisia's call for the convening of a full-fledged international conference with the participation of all relevant parties to engage in a genuine peace process based on international law, United Nations resolutions, the relevant terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. We hope that the Middle East Quartet will maintain its support of

peace and redouble its efforts to break the current impasse in the peace process.

The socioeconomic and humanitarian situations in the occupied Palestinian territories are deteriorating. We therefore call on international donors to increase their economic and humanitarian support to Palestine. We also call on the international community to compel the occupation authorities to lift the restrictions imposed upon freedom of movement and to end the embargo in Gaza.

We stress the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to around 5.5 million Palestinian refugees and supports stability in the region. There is an urgent need to promote and increase the support addressed to UNRWA.

In conclusion, we reiterate Tunisia's steadfast and principled support for the rights of Palestinian people, which are not subject to statute of limitation. We are always ready to pursue our efforts for achieving lasting and comprehensive peace.

Since this is Tunisia's final scheduled meeting as a member of the Security Council, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your able leadership of the Council this month. I thank all colleagues and delegations of Member States for their cooperation and positive interaction over the past two years, despite all the difficulties and challenges faced by the Council. I also thank the Council's secretariat, headed by Ms. Hasmik Egian, and all her colleagues for their assistance and cooperation, and wish the new Member States that will join the Council on 1 January 2022 all the success. We reiterate our readiness to continue cooperation with all Member States pertaining to all issues in the service of peace and security and in support of multilateralism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Tunisia for his kind words.

Ms. Juul (Norway): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and for the twentieth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Once again, today's reporting shows that the deeply disturbing trend of settlement activity, demolitions, evictions and violence continues unabated. We urge the Israeli Government to halt and reverse that trend. Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. The expansion of settlements in and around Jerusalem

and deep into Area C contribute to undermining the prospects of a future contiguous Palestinian State.

Israel's decision not to approve — in the immediate future — the building of settlement units in Atarot is a step in the right direction, but the media has also recently reported worrying plans for settlements in Beit Safafa, Sheikh Jarrah, Dahiat Al-Barid/Beit Hanina and Sur Baher.

Today's reporting describes daily violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, high levels of settler-related violence, attacks by Palestinians against Israelis and the use of lethal force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians. We condemn all acts of violence. They must be stopped.

We are especially concerned about children, who are experiencing violence and threats — including on their way to school — by settlers and reportedly also by Israeli security forces. Those responsible for violent acts must be held to account. Israel has responsibility to protect all civilians from violence, including children, as well as to uphold their right to education.

Norway also remains concerned about the Palestinian Authority's financial situation. A sustainable Palestinian economy is critical, both for long-term State-building and the more immediate need for stability. We welcome the stepped up engagement between senior Israeli and Palestinian officials in that regard.

We are also encouraged by reports of progress in implementing the recommendations from the meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and the Middle East Quartet held in Oslo in November. That includes the entry of goods and materials into Gaza being increased; the total numbers of permits issued for Gaza traders being expanded to 10,000; the parties agreeing on all technicalities shifting to a digital value added tax collection system; and the opening of a new water line that allows for an additional 5 million cubic meters of water into central Gaza, improving the water quality there.

Norway also welcomes the agreement between the European Union and the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to launch shipments of containers through the King Hussein/Allenby Bridge border crossing with Jordan. We welcome the decisions of continued

assistance by Qatar into the year 2022 and \$100 million of additional financial support provided by Algeria to the Palestinian Authority.

We commend the Palestinian Authority for holding the first round of local elections on 11 December. It is now imperative that the second round of elections is held as planned in March 2022. Palestinians deserve democracy and the rule of law with security, equal rights and opportunities for all. The absence of regular national elections weakens the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and there is an urgent need to strengthen it.

Finally, let me reiterate Norway's continued support for and belief in the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines, the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), international law and the international agreed parameters.

Before concluding, let me also congratulate the Niger on a successful presidency this month and thank all outgoing colleagues for their excellent work and cooperation this year.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Norway for her kind words.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

Resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted by the Council to reaffirm the international community's firm commitment towards preventing the erosion of the two-State solution. It calls upon parties to prevent all acts of violence against civilians; stresses that all settlement activities must cease; and underscores the need to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues.

The recent developments on ground, as revealed in the latest report of the Secretary-General, indicate that resolution 2334 (2016) is yet to be fully implemented in its letter and spirit. Violent attacks against Palestinian and Israeli civilians have continued during the reporting period, as have acts of destruction, provocation and incitement. We condemn all such acts.

Prospects of the possible eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah remain high. Tension continues to prevail at the holy sites of Jerusalem. Settlement activity has resumed after a brief hiatus. We call upon the parties to immediately make concrete

efforts to reverse those negative trends. Unilateral actions that unduly alter the status quo on the ground pose serious challenges and undercut the viability of the two-State solution. They must be avoided in the interest of peace and stability.

Instead, parties must engage in constructive steps that create conducive conditions for the resumption of peace talks. We acknowledge that some steps have recently been initiated in that regard. The Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have opened a channel of communication. Steps have been taken to stabilize the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority and improve the socioeconomic conditions of Palestinians, including through the progressive easing of restrictions in the Gaza Strip for commodities and construction materials and increasing work permits for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

The successful conclusion of the prisoner exchange talks would help the process further. We encourage everyone to build on such measures and create more avenues of cooperation, which can help overcome the trust deficit.

India's support for a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict is consistent and well known. We believe that durable and long-lasting peace can be achieved between the people of Israel and Palestine only through a two-State solution, which entails the establishment of a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine within recognized and mutually agreed borders, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Both the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns can be fulfilled through an open and direct dialogue between Israel and Palestine based on the internationally agreed framework. We reiterate that there is no alternative to direct peace negotiations between the parties.

Thirty years ago, the international community helped to open a channel for direct talks between Israel and Palestine through the Madrid Peace Conference. A similar effort is now required to overcome the present impasse. India stands ready to support all efforts aimed at the resumption of direct negotiations and facilitating the peace process to achieve a two-State solution.

Before I conclude, allow me to convey our deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to the Niger

for your presidency, as well as our appreciation to all outgoing members. We wish them every success.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of India for his kind words.

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

Two days from now, it will be the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). Regrettably, the resolution remains unimplemented to this day. The settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory not only have not ceased but have continued to expand. This year, in Area C of the West Bank, tenders have been announced for more than 3,300 settlement units, which is almost double the figure of 2020. A total of 835 Palestinian structures were demolished, displacing 1,044 Palestinians, which is the highest number since 2016. China is deeply concerned about that. Settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory violate international law, undermine the contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory, squeeze the living space for Palestinians and continuously jeopardize the prospects for the two-State solution. We once again urge Israel to abide by resolution 2334 (2016), cease all settlement activities and return to the track of the two-State solution.

The security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is worrisome. Since early this year, military and police operations in the West Bank have caused massive Palestinian casualties. Violence by the Israeli settlers has intensified, and attacks frequently occur. The tensions near Nablus last week once again sounded the alarm. We urge all parties to remain calm, exercise restraint, refrain from measures that could lead to further escalations, avoid harming civilians and work together to de-escalate the situation.

Israel should earnestly fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law, ensure the safety of the people of the occupied territory and their property and thoroughly investigate attacks by settlers and incidents of violence against civilians in order to bring the perpetrators to justice. At the same time, Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns should also be respected.

The per capita gross domestic product in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been shrinking for years. The Palestinian Authority faces a financial crisis. After the conflict in May, Gaza is in dire need of recovery and

reconstruction. The people in the occupied Palestinian territory are suffering hardship. The international community should take urgent action, provide assistance to Palestine through multiple channels and support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in its relief and assistance work. Israel should further facilitate access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials and lift the blockade and siege on Gaza as soon as possible.

China has always cared about the Palestinian people. We have already provided Palestine and UNRWA with multiple batches of assistance, including among other things, cash transfers, anti-pandemic supplies and coronavirus disease vaccines. We will donate another 1.5 million doses of vaccine to Palestine. We will provide 500,000 doses to the people in Gaza, in partnership with Egypt, and 200,000 doses to UNRWA.

The issue of Palestine has always been at the heart of the Middle East question. The international community should maintain the right path of the two-State solution and make greater efforts to advance the Middle East peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and other international consensus. We must not allow 2022 to become yet another year misspent. We hope that Palestine and Israel will take the opportunity afforded by the recent high-level contacts, continue to build momentum, gradually re-establish mutual trust and resume equal dialogue at an early date.

We call for broader international efforts for peace and support the United Nations, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and countries with significant influence in playing a more positive role. The Security Council should also shoulder its responsibilities, have a greater sense of urgency and work actively towards the just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Niger, and in particular you, Ambassador Abarry, for your excellent work during your presidency this month. I also appreciate the work and contribution of Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam as Council members.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of China for his kind words.

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

This week marks five years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which sought, among other things, to halt the expansion of settlements. After reviewing and receiving the Secretary-General's regular reports on the implementation of that resolution, it is clear that much remains to be done.

Today, nearly 800,000 Israeli settlers live in settlements, representing a 53 per cent increase in the past five years. Housing units continue to be built, thereby impeding the geographical contiguity of the Palestinian territory. In addition, the rate of demolitions in 2021 was the highest since 2009.

Such settlements violate international law, pose an obstacle to the two-State solution and hinder prospects for a sustainable peace. Mexico once again urges Israel to halt the construction of new housing units, as well as the confiscation and demolition of, and eviction from, Palestinian properties. We support full respect for the legal obligations contained in resolution 2334 (2016).

The briefing by the Special Coordinator highlights the continuing volatility on the ground. It also points out the increase in violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Both the frequent clashes between the Israeli security forces and Palestinian civilians and those between settlers and Palestinians are unacceptable. In the past two years, 540 settler attacks have been recorded. In the past week alone, violent incidents again occurred on the outskirts of Nablus. We also condemn acts that violate the status of holy sites in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We also note that, in 2021, at least 341 Palestinian minors have been detained by Israeli law enforcement forces, and that many of them have suffered mistreatment and have no access to legal counsel. We condemn that and recall that the detention of minors must be an exceptional measure and that it must comply with international standards of juvenile justice.

We also express our dismay at the reduction of democratic space for civil society, both by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We stress the importance of respecting fundamental freedoms and of creating spaces that are conducive to the full exercise of the freedom of expression and association.

We welcome the continuation of the legal process to clarify the facts surrounding the death of activist Nizar Banat, in the hope that it will enable the identification and prosecution of those responsible. We also commend the organization of the local elections held on 11 December in 154 localities in the West Bank, but we again urge the Palestinian Authority to hold general elections as soon as possible.

We welcome the cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian authorities in civil and security matters, as well as the trade exchange between Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. We also welcome the confidence-building measures taken in Gaza, such as the issuance of permits for Palestinian workers, the supply of drinking water and the easing of restrictions. However, the economy continues to deteriorate sharply, making it imperative to lift the blockade on the Strip.

As a country committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes, we reiterate that, through the Security Council's work, Mexico favours a comprehensive and definitive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is based on the premise of two States, addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and allows for the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State within secure and internationally recognized borders, as well as the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We therefore call for a decisive push for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) in order to achieve the goals set five years ago.

In conclusion, as this is the last briefing of the month, I join my colleagues in warmly thanking the presidency of the Niger for its successful leadership of the Council's work this month. On behalf of my country and my delegation, I recognize and express gratitude for the valuable contributions of Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Viet Nam over the past two years in the Security Council. On a personal note, it has been a pleasure to work with them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Mexico for his kind words addressed to me.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Niger.

I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East. My delegation followed with great interest the briefing by the Special Coordinator and takes note of the Secretary-General's comments on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

During its two-year term on the Council, the Niger has continued to deplore the lack of effective measures for the implementation of that important resolution. The disturbing elements highlighted by the Secretary-General's latest report reinforce our disappointment with this state of affairs. These developments include the continued unbridled expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, in particular through the accelerated issuance of building permits in the occupied West Bank and in areas of East Jerusalem, thereby jeopardizing the territorial continuity of a future Palestinian State with these areas.

It is high time that the international community and the Security Council abandon their wait-and-see attitude of reiterating positions of principle and other professions of faith while the prospect of an independent Palestinian State and the two-State solution recede from view. We must finally act decisively to save the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the *sine qua non* for which, as we all know, is the end of Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. Indeed, it is the continuation of that abject policy of expropriating Palestinian lands — which has repeatedly resulted in evictions, destruction and forced displacement of Palestinian civilians — that leads to the kinds of escalations that this year have sparked particularly deadly confrontations between those two peoples.

At this point, I would like to mention two other equally disturbing elements, also highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, and which characterize the policy pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Palestinian territories. These are the continued demolition of Palestinian structures and the resurgence of settler violence against Palestinian civilians. As of December, no fewer than 835 Palestinian structures had been demolished by the Israeli authorities, very often on the basis of military regulations whose illegality under international law is well known to all. This year alone, these demolitions have resulted in the displacement of approximately 1,044 people, the highest number of displaced persons since 2016.

In addition to the despair and desolation of entire families thrown out on the street, there is the persecution and attacks on the Palestinians by Israeli settlers, whose activities benefit from the protection of the Israeli law enforcement forces. This settler violence has reached worrisome proportions since 2017, with several Palestinians killed by live ammunition and several others injured in violent incidents involving settlers.

All of these illegal and ruthless practices by the occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territories have, over time, become the principal obstacle to the restoration of trust and peaceful coexistence between the two peoples — a genuine obstacle to progress towards the only valid solution, that is, the two-State solution.

Furthermore, the Niger hopes that with the prospect of a return to the negotiating table between Israelis and Palestinians, the various Palestinian factions will benefit from reconciliation to speak with one voice. That can be done only through the organization of credible general elections, which will help pave the way for peace. We call on the international community to support the Palestinians in this promising effort, with a view to a rapid return to the negotiating table for a two-State solution.

The socioeconomic and humanitarian situation throughout the occupied Palestinian territories is another source of concern, as rightly addressed by the Secretary-General's report. Indeed, the tension in Gaza, which is a veritable open-air prison, reflects the deep despair of a population that is subject to the worst forms of harassment, deprivation and humiliation, owing to the prolonged blockade imposed by Israel. The Gaza Strip today, with one of the highest densities in the world and facing extreme poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and a multitude of humanitarian challenges

brought about by the most recent war, meets all the criteria of an unliveable area.

The situation in the West Bank is also worrisome, in particular the economic recession resulting from years of stagnation, declining investments, the Palestinian Authority's budget deficit and Israel's continued withholding of Palestinian Government revenues. That is why, given its crucial importance in assisting the Palestinian people held hostage by Israel, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East deserves to be supported and to have its work funded. We therefore call on the international community to be even more generous and to disburse the funds pledged in order to enable the Agency to continue providing essential services, especially now, in the time of the pandemic.

In conclusion, my delegation recalls that the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) continues to be a true test of the Council's authority and its capacity to enforce its own resolutions on Israel. It is time to act for the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State because maintaining the status quo will only perpetuate hatred, violence and the unacceptable triumph of the law of the jungle. It would constitute the most appalling illustration of the failure of the international system to protect the weak from the tyranny of the powerful, as well as a flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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 on the subject in closed consultations.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.