



Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

9046th meeting

Thursday, 26 May 2022, 10.50 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mrs. Gasri
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mrs. Hackman
India	Mr. Asokan
Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
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Mexico	Mr. Ochoa Martínez
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 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 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Mr. Daniel Munayer, Executive Director of Musalaha; and Ms. Robi Damelin, Spokesperson, Parents Circle.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: Allow me at the outset to acknowledge the killing of the revered Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh as she covered events in Jenin on 11 May. Her death brought together Palestinians and countless others around the world in grief and anger, while serving as another reminder of the devastating human cost of this conflict. I send my deepest condolences to her family and reiterate the Secretary-General's condemnation of all attacks on journalists and his call to the relevant authorities to carry out an independent and transparent investigation. Those responsible must be held to account.

Regrettably, recent weeks have been filled with the familiar patterns of daily violence, including armed clashes, settlement expansion and evictions, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures, as well as a deadly terrorist attack in Israel. Meanwhile, the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), compounded by the constraints of the occupation, the absence of serious Palestinian reforms and unclear prospects for donor support, is dire and requires urgent attention. Without meaningful policy steps on Israel's

part, bold reforms on the part of the PA and increased donor support, those economic challenges will continue.

In Gaza, efforts by the United Nations and international partners to improve Palestinian lives, along with measures taken by Israel to ease the pressure and facilitate more economic activity, have enabled the fragile ceasefire to continue. Keeping things calm, however, is neither sufficient nor sustainable. More needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and lift Israeli closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The persistence of those conflict drivers and the absence of real political will to change course have empowered extremists and are eroding the perception among Palestinians and Israelis that a resolution of the conflict is achievable. Those dynamics, combined with the financial crisis, are converging and intensifying dangerously. While immediate steps to reverse the negative trends and support the Palestinian people are essential, a better coordinated and more strategic approach by the parties and the international community is needed. Economic relief must be expanded and made more sustainable.

An agreed and updated regulatory framework for the Israeli-Palestinian economic relationship is not only vital to bringing meaningful economic dividends for the Palestinians, but it would also add a tangible political perspective to those economic steps. However, that approach must be combined with political and security steps that address core conflict drivers and ultimately lead us towards an end to the occupation and the achievement of a negotiated two-State solution.

The daily violence has continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. During the reporting period, 10 Palestinians, including one woman and three children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks on Israelis and other incidents, and 346 Palestinians, including five children, were injured. Israeli settlers and other civilians perpetrated 57 attacks on Palestinians resulting in the death of one Palestinian child and 24 injured, along with damage to property. In all, four Israeli civilians and one member of Israeli security personnel were killed, and 22 civilians, including five women and three children, and 20 Israeli security forces officers were injured by Palestinians in shooting and stabbing attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents during the reporting period. In total, there

were 80 attacks by Palestinians on Israeli civilians, causing injuries and damage to Israeli property.

On 29 April and 5 May, violent confrontations between Israeli security forces and Palestinians took place at the holy sites in Jerusalem, with Israeli security forces using physical force to disperse Palestinians. Forty-four Palestinians were injured. On 29 April, armed Palestinians shot and killed an Israeli civilian guard in the settlement of Ariel. Israeli forces arrested two suspects on 30 April. On 5 May, two Palestinians from the Jenin area killed three Israeli civilians and wounded four others with axes in a terrorist attack in the Israeli city of Elad. Israeli security forces arrested the perpetrators on 8 May.

Also on 8 May, a 17-year-old Palestinian reportedly carrying a knife climbed a fence to enter the Israeli settlement of Tekoa and was shot and killed by a resident. Hamas later claimed him as a member. The same day, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man attempting to cross the security fence near Tulkarm. On 11 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian in Al-Bireh, where, according to eyewitnesses, some 30 Palestinian youths were throwing stones at Israeli security forces.

Following terrorist attacks in Israel that killed 18 people over the past two months, Israeli security forces have continued intensive search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, particularly around Jenin, which have led to clashes, including with armed Palestinian militants, in which many Palestinians have been killed and injured. In that context, on 30 April, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces in the village of Azzun, near Qalqilya. The man reportedly threw a Molotov cocktail at the soldiers. According to a video, he was shot in the back while running away.

On 11 May, the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was shot and killed while covering an Israeli security forces operation in Jenin, in which Palestinian militants exchanged fire with Israeli security forces. Another journalist was shot and injured in the same incident. Both were wearing press vests and helmets. Scenes of violence during Abu Akleh's funeral procession, where Israeli police entered the hospital and subsequently beat pallbearers and other mourners with batons, were deeply distressing and offensive and widely condemned.

On 15 May, the funeral of an 18-year-old Palestinian, who had died the previous day from injuries suffered on

22 April during clashes with Israeli security forces at the holy sites, also led to confrontations between Israeli police and Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

On 20 May, during a search operation in Jenin, during which there was an exchange of fire, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian, reportedly while he was throwing a Molotov cocktail.

On 24 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian and injured more than 20 others in Nablus during clashes near Joseph's Tomb. Israeli security forces said that they fired at the Palestinian, who had thrown a Molotov cocktail at them and Jewish worshippers at the site.

Settler violence continued during the reporting period. On 26 April, Israeli settlers erected a tent on private Palestinian land near the Ma'ale Adumim settlement. When asked to leave, the settlers attacked and injured four Palestinians, including a 68-year-old, with multiple fractures. During the reporting period, in eight separate incidents, Israeli settlers, accompanied by Israeli security forces, entered five Palestinian towns, resulting in 57 Palestinians injured. In the town of Hares, west of Salfit, a young Palestinian was injured by live ammunition, reportedly by one of the settlers, while two others were shot by Israeli security forces with rubber-coated metal bullets.

I reiterate that the perpetrators of all acts of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. There is no justification for acts of terrorism and violence against civilians. Such acts must clearly be condemned by all. I also reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

On 22 May, the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court cancelled an order by Israeli police temporarily banning from the holy sites three Jewish Israelis who performed prayers there. The judge stated that his ruling did not "determine anything regarding freedom of worship" at the holy sites. Following an appeal by Israeli police, the Jerusalem District Court overturned the decision on 25 May. In her decision, the judge noted that the right to freedom of worship "is not absolute, and should be superseded by other interests, among them the safeguarding of public order".

In another worrying development, on 12 May, for the first time in some seven months, the Israeli authorities advanced plans for more than 4,000 housing units in settlements in Area C of the occupied West

Bank, approximately one third in outlying locations. Those include the retroactive approval of two outposts, illegal also under international law.

On 28 April, Israel's Supreme Court rejected a petition against the construction of 31 settlement housing units in an apartment complex in Hebron. If built, those units would be the first new settlement construction in the city in nearly 20 years.

On 15 May, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected four petitions against a highly controversial plan to construct a cable car between West Jerusalem and the Old City, continuing worrying trends in and around Jerusalem.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. I urge the Israeli authorities to cease the advancement of all settlement activities and refrain from actions that fuel instability and undermine the prospects for the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State.

Despite a notable reduction during Ramadan, the Israeli authorities demolished, seized and forced owners to demolish 40 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 12 in occupied East Jerusalem, as well as two structures in Area A, displacing 98 Palestinians, including 50 children. The demolitions were carried out citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 25 April, the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court accepted the appeal of a Palestinian family against its pending eviction in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, ordering the case to be reconsidered by the Israeli authorities, while an eviction freeze remains in place.

On 4 May, the Israeli High Court of Justice decided to allow the implementation of eviction orders issued to 1,200 Palestinian residents, including 500 children, in Masafer Yatta, in the southern part of the West Bank. In its ruling, the Court said that permanent structures in that area did not exist when it was declared a firing zone by the Israeli military in the 1980s, almost 40 years ago. The Palestinian residents dispute that claim.

I am deeply concerned by the potential implications of the High Court's ruling and the humanitarian toll on the communities in question if eviction orders are carried out. I call on the Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians in line with Israeli obligations under international humanitarian

law, and to approve plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

On 10 May, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians met in Brussels, with a focus on key economic files, including PA fiscal reform, enhancing PA revenues and improved trade and water and energy supplies.

Turning to Gaza, the United Nations continues to deliver vital humanitarian and development assistance, as well as to make efforts towards further easing restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip. Plans are in place to support the revitalization of Gaza's fishery sector, including facilitating the entry of dual-use items under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. The success of that initiative could pave the way for a further easing of restrictions, including in the agriculture, industry and health sectors. To improve oncology services in Gaza and reduce the debt burden on the PA from medical referrals, the United Nations is leading preparations for a five-year operational plan for oncology, which will include prevention, treatment and palliative care.

Between 3 and 14 May, the Israeli authorities closed the Erez pedestrian crossing between Gaza and Israel except for humanitarian cases. The decision followed the firing of several rockets from Gaza towards Israel in April, as well as incitement by senior Hamas leaders calling on Palestinians to carry out attacks against Israelis.

Turning to the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria continues to be generally maintained in a volatile environment, with continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties. That includes the 11 May firing by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) across the ceasefire line and the continued presence of Syrian armed forces in the area of separation. The parties must respect their obligations under the Agreement and prevent an escalation of the situation.

In Lebanon, parliamentary elections were held on 15 May. Local and international observers expressed some concern over incidents of vote buying and electoral violence. The United Nations looks forward to the swift formation of a new Government to implement Lebanon's urgent recovery and reform agenda.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon convened a tripartite meeting on 19 May with

representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the IDF. Major General Lázaro called on the parties to look forward to practical arrangements, including to mark points along the Blue Line as previously agreed.

In my previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.9021), I raised concerns about the potential for violence during Ramadan but made clear that a serious escalation was avoidable. Thanks to efforts by all parties, a major outbreak of violence was, in fact, avoided. However, trends in the West Bank have deteriorated. As Jerusalem Day, on 29 May, approaches, with the planned provocative flag march through the Muslim quarter in the Old City, I again urge authorities to take wise decisions to minimize confrontation and the risk of more violence and escalation. I reiterate that the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites must be upheld and respected.

More broadly, I am extremely concerned that the current dynamics, particularly in the occupied West Bank, could spiral out of control at any time. I encourage leaders on both sides to make difficult, but critical, decisions that will take us back from the brink and help stabilize the situation. Irresponsible and provocative language and incitements to violence must stop.

Positive Israeli economic measures with regard to the Palestinians are regularly undermined by parallel negative steps, such as settlement advancement, demolitions and continued violence. At the same time, the dire fiscal and financial forecast facing the Palestinian Authority looms, amid a lack of prospects for real institutional reform.

We must push beyond the paradigm of managing the conflict and move towards resolving it. There are tangible, ongoing arrangements that can be regularized and expanded immediately if there is political will.

I remain actively engaged with Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community and urge them to take action that will lead us back to the path of negotiations that will end the occupation and establish two States, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Munayer.

Mr. Munayer: My name is Daniel Munayer. I was born and raised in Jerusalem. I come from an old

Palestinian Christian family from the city of Lydda. Through the Eastern Orthodox Church, we can trace our presence in the land for 800 years.

Today I am the Executive Director of Musalaha, which means reconciliation in Arabic. We do reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as between Muslim and Christian Palestinians. The way we do reconciliation is by taking groups together to the desert, where they meet for the first time. After spending five days together in the desert, we have a series of workshops in which we address various subjects, such as conflict, identity, obstacles to reconciliation and history and narrative.

After our participants go through this process, we then ask them to go back into the community, to engage with the people in society, to deal with the core issues of the conflict and to co-resist the injustices that exist in our society.

But in reality, on the ground, Israelis and Palestinians who go back home go back to very different political realities. Many of our Palestinian participants go back to a military occupation, and many of them are still living in refugee camps. Many of our Israeli participants go back to Tel Aviv or other cities where the conflict is almost not felt.

I would like to highlight three distinct areas that are damaging our ability to make an impact regarding reconciliation back home — civic space, freedom of religion and belief and accountability.

In terms of civic space, the ability to meet and engage together positively is shrinking. In addition, civil society within Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are cut off from each other, and there is very little ability for them to engage with one another.

A major factor that hinders our ability to do reconciliation is the imbalance of power. I come from a neighbourhood in Jerusalem where there is the Jewish neighbourhood and the Palestinian village. There was a joint initiative to bring people together to discuss the core issues that exist in our village and neighbourhood. The main issues, according to the Palestinians, are house demolitions and obtaining building permits. On the Israeli side, the primary concern was too many stray cats.

I also want to reiterate that there are students in Tel Aviv University who were protesting with Palestinian flags. In response to that, there was a member of

Knesset who stood up in front of the whole Parliament and said, “Do not forget what happened to you in 1948”.

These are concerning and disturbing comments made by politicians.

On my second point — freedom of religion and belief — as an organization, we believe that religion and faith can be used as a positive means of engagement and build bridges between people. Yet we can see that Israel is trying to turn this into a religious conflict. Worshippers were attacked during prayers in Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Mosque itself — the third holiest site in Islam — was damaged. Palestinian Christians had limited access and were even denied access to the Church of the Resurrection and the Old City. Church land was confiscated, and attacks were carried out during religious ceremonies. The attack carried out during Shireen Abu Akleh’s funeral in a church hospital is a case in point. It speaks to the need for protection and the freedom of the press.

The third area I would like to bring up is accountability. In our model, reconciliation is not possible without justice. Reconciliation means upholding human rights. Reconciliation means working towards equality. Reconciliation means ending the occupation. We need international pressure, intervention and accountability to protect the residents of Jerusalem — our participants, who are going back to their homes and are facing threats of demolitions and settler and police violence. We heard about what is happening in Masafer Yatta, with Israel’s High Court of Justice ruling, but also in Silwan, 90 per cent of which has been zoned for Solomon’s Garden, which would leave only 10 per cent of the housing not demolished.

As a civil-society organization, Musalaha is committed to supporting a just political solution through non-violent and positive engagement, gender equality and the participation of women and advocating for a just solution from the bottom up. But I urge the Security Council to play its role in applying pressure from the top to the bottom.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Damelin.

Ms. Damelin: I did not come here to bring dialogue, show PowerPoint presentations or make wonderful statements about intellectual ways to end this conflict. I came here to speak to the hearts of one and all because that is what I can do. I am one of the victims, but I

do not call myself a victim. I have become a victor of what is happening in a conflict that should have ended long ago.

We could sit here and give a comparison of suffering, and I could give counterarguments. But the fact is that people are dying. Sixty-eight children died in Gaza. Who will remember their names? Does anyone here know any of their names?

It is very difficult for me to sit here and not talk about the reality of what it is to lose a child. When the army came to tell me that my son had been killed by a Palestinian sniper, one of the first things that I said was: “You may not kill anybody in the name of my child”. That has been the work I have been doing ever since.

I joined the Parents Circle-Families Forum, an organization of more than 600 families that have all lost an immediate family member to the conflict. What we see as a vision is to create a framework for a reconciliation process to be an integral part of any political peace agreement. We signed all kinds of stuff on the White House lawn. Everybody held each other and it all looked very charming. But the people were never involved. We have to do something to bring the realization that without that reconciliation, there will never be peace. At best, there can be a ceasefire until the next time.

I joined the Parents Circle after I had been to a weekend in East Jerusalem with other bereaved Palestinian mothers. I looked into their eyes and, I suddenly realized that we shared the same pain and that I stood over the same grave for my own child as Bushra stood over for her child. The tears that fell in that grave were the same colour. And if we together could stand on the same stage and talk in the same voice for reconciliation, for non-violence and for getting out of the occupied territories, would that not be the most powerful statement and an example to others? Making political statements is all very well. It is all very well being pro-Israel or pro-Palestine, but what are people doing with that? They are importing our conflict into their country and creating hatred between Jews and Muslims. So if a person cannot be a part of the solution, I would urge that person to leave us alone.

Come to Israel and Palestine, come and see what is happening on the ground. Listen with empathy. Come and watch one of our dialogue meetings or one of our women’s groups. Go into an average Israeli school of 17-year-olds, a Palestinian and an Israeli. Normally, I

would have sat next to the Palestinian. I found it rather strange that we had to sit separately, because that is the way that we work. If one were to go into an average Israeli school of 17-year-olds and ask the children who has ever met a Palestinian, the answer would be nobody. Or if one were to ask who speaks Arabic, the answer would be maybe one person in the whole class. Or if one asked who has been overseas, the answer would be maybe 80 per cent of the kids. And yet they have never met a Palestinian. They have never met the humanity in the other. And suddenly, they hear a story of transformation, of loss, of somebody who got up at four o'clock in the morning and faced the indignities of going through a checkpoint to come to their school to talk about non-violence and change — to talk about their own story. Suddenly, there is a human being. And, by the way, they do not all become Martin Luther King, but they do have a sense of who is on the other side.

I often go into many homes in the West Bank — and not only me. I am here as a person, but I represent 600 families. When I go into a Palestinian home, they look at me quite aggressively in the beginning. But when I tell my personal story, there is an emotional breakthrough because they suddenly see the humanity. What also happens is that they join the Parents Circle. And it is not only for bereaved people. We work mainly on the ground with parallel narratives that many of the countries — as I look around me — could well learn from some of our projects. I want to bring hope because I listen to youth talking, and all that I can sense is a comparison of suffering and a lack of hope.

I want to tell the Council a short story about hope. We have a very active women's group in the Parents Circle. I came to talk to a group of Palestinian women one Saturday morning and asked them: "What is it that you really need?" They said: "We need money. We want to earn our own living". I ask Council members to consider that it is not very easy to be a peacemaker if one does not have money to pay for school for one's children or for food to put on the table. I asked those women then what they loved to do, what their passion was. One of them liked to arrange flowers, another to style hair, another to sew, another to take photographs, another loved being an accountant. I said: "Let us open a wedding planning business". And guess what? The light suddenly came back into the eyes of those women. Do not forget that any Palestinian who belongs to the Parents Circle is already a leader working against the tide. Imagine the light that comes into a woman's eyes when she knows she has a future profession. Last week,

14 women started to take a course to get certified and then, to have a profession. Imagine how joyful that is in these terribly dark times. We will do two weddings for brides who cannot afford to pay, as a beginning to this programme.

That initiative brings hope. We started a parallel narrative course this week. There are many things happening on the ground that many people are probably not aware of. I wish that instead of sitting around this table, everyone would take themselves off and come to understand that there is hope, because I can confidently say in this Chamber that if there is no hope, there will never be peace. It is a remarkably important equation for any peace-seeking work. Please look into the work of any of so many organizations. Two weeks ago, we organized a memorial ceremony on the official memorial day for Israeli soldiers. But we conduct an alternative ceremony, with Palestinians and Israelis coming to tell the stories of their losses. One Palestinian whose son had been killed donated his son's organs to Israeli hospitals. Imagine what that is like for an Israeli who has never heard a story like that to be exposed to it. By the way, 200,000 people tuned in online to that ceremony.

This is a very important step for us to make and for people to listen to. The Palestinians in our organizations joke that if Hamas kidnaps them, they would be returned in half an hour because they talk so much.

I am grateful for this small opportunity to brief the Council, but it would be so much better if its members could listen with empathy.

The President: I thank Ms. Damelin for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

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

Let me start by thanking Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. We strongly support his continued close engagement with all parties as we work to foster dialogue. I also thank Ms. Robi Damelin and Mr. Daniel Munayer for their briefings on reconciliation efforts between Israelis and Palestinians. That work is vital to building confidence in one another. As our

civil-society briefers reminded us, dialogue is essential to understanding and cooperation, and we welcome efforts to increase collaboration between the parties. I really appreciate that Ms. Damelin reminded us of the importance of hope — hope for a future and hope for peace.

With that aim, the United States was pleased to participate in the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and we welcome the tangible announcements, including a joint commission on water and working-level discussions related to financing and taxation. These types of discussions play an important role, and we fully support these efforts. But even as we push for dialogue and cooperation, we must also call out any and all violence.

The string of recent terrorist attacks against Israelis has been horrific. After the attack in Elad earlier this month, 16 children will never see their parents again. We know that feeling. We deplore these terrorist attacks. Violence is never the solution.

We also mourn the heart-wrenching killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on 11 May. Shireen was a widely respected veteran reporter whom I had the pleasure of meeting. She was a role model for many aspiring journalists, particularly women and girls, and her work was followed closely by those who care about the region. We strongly condemn her killing, and we call for an immediate, thorough, transparent and impartial investigation, and, upon the conclusion of an investigation, we expect full accountability for those found responsible.

In the region and around the world, journalists play a fundamental role in the free flow of information, ideas and opinions. Their work is essential to inclusive and tolerant societies. We will continue to prioritize media freedom and defend journalists' ability to do their job without fear or threats of violence or unjust detention. Shireen's killing is a tragic loss and an affront to press freedom everywhere.

Compounding this loss was the violence at Shireen's funeral procession on 13 May, and we have directly shared our concern with Israel with regard to the troubling footage of Israeli police intruding on the procession. Every family deserves to be able to lay their loved ones to rest in a dignified and unimpeded manner.

The violence following Shireen's killing and funeral only adds to the increasing tensions we witnessed during the convergence of Ramadan, Passover and Easter last

month. That included multiple terrorist attacks against Israel and rockets fired from Gaza and Lebanon, which we also condemn in the strongest terms. We appeal to all sides to work cooperatively to lower tensions and honour Shireen, by redoubling efforts to promote peace.

It is important to refrain from unilateral actions that exacerbate tensions and jeopardize a negotiated two-State solution. This includes the situation in Masafer Yatta, and other evictions, which we continue to monitor closely and about which we continue to voice our concerns. When such actions violate the law, the perpetrators, whether Israeli or Palestinian, should be held accountable by the relevant authorities.

I would like to now shift our focus to how Russia's unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine is affecting food insecurity in the region. As we have made clear in the Security Council, Russia is actively impeding Ukrainian farmers and blocking food exports. We know this is having a particularly devastating impact on the Middle East and Africa. This makes the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which supports vulnerable populations on the ground, more critical than ever. Member States must keep this in mind as we approach next month's pledging conference. Too often, supportive statements by Governments for UNRWA are not accompanied by financial contributions. We strongly encourage States to join us in funding UNRWA so it can ensure that those in need receive support to cope with rising food prices and so that it can continue to provide education and health care to Palestinian refugees.

At the same time, we invite Member States to join us in promoting UNRWA's efforts to strengthen its effectiveness and financial sustainability. We will continue to work with UNRWA to bolster the Agency's accountability, transparency and consistency with humanitarian principles, including neutrality. Only in this spirit of cooperation among Member States, but especially between Israelis and Palestinians, can we pursue equal measures of freedom, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

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

have also listened attentively to the briefings presented by Mr. Daniel Munayer and Ms. Robi Damelin.

During the past month, the security situation in the occupied Palestine territory remained turbulent, with multiple clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, resulting in a continued increase in Palestinian civilian casualties. Attacks against Israeli civilians also occurred from time to time. Religious believers in the occupied territories, be they Muslims or Jews, were unable to celebrate their religious holidays in peace and tranquillity.

The various factors contributing to the rising tensions between Palestine and Israel were brought into sharp relief just recently. A number of these factors are still fermenting. We are extremely worried about this. The recent developments between the two sides have raised a red flag for the international community and call for well-tailored solutions.

The current situation once again gives witness to the importance of upholding the status quo of holy sites. Holy sites carry the collective sentiments of religious believers and have seen multiple incidents of bloodshed. China calls on all the parties concerned to learn from history, jointly safeguard the historical status quo of religious sites, respect Jordan's custodianship of the holy sites and refrain from any unilateral action to change the status quo.

Jerusalem Day is just around the corner. We call on all parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and avoid the resurgence of conflict.

The current situation between Palestine and Israel is further testimony to the importance of achieving common security. On 11 May, the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed while covering Israeli security operations in the West Bank city of Jenin. The Security Council issued a press statement strongly condemning the killing and demanded an immediate, thorough, transparent, impartial and fair investigation (SC/14891). We note with concern the latest reports on the incident. We urge relevant parties to carry out an investigation and publish their conclusion without delay, as called for by the Council.

We note with equal concern that yet another 16-year-old Palestinian boy was shot and killed by Israel in the West Bank the day before yesterday. Every civilian killed by conflict in the occupied territory leaves behind a broken family. The ever-rising number of civilian casualties only aggravates the animosity

between Palestinians and Israelis and undermines mutual trust. Palestine and Israel cannot unneighbour each other; they have a stake in one another's security. They should find a way to live side by side in harmony and shared security. Israeli security forces should abide by the principle of proportionality in law enforcement and not use excessive force.

The current situation between Palestine Israel shows once again the importance of implementing international parameters. Building settlements in the occupied territory violates international law, disrupts the contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory and compromises the prospects for a two-State solution. China is concerned about Israel's announcement of a new settlement-construction plan and urges Israel to stop all settlement activities, as required by Council resolutions.

A two-State solution is the fundamental way forward for achieving peace between Palestine and Israel and must be observed and implemented. Only by realizing such a solution and restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people can we break the cycle of violence. The international community cannot substitute crisis management for a just solution when it comes to the question of Palestine. The relevant parties with major influence on the question should uphold objectivity and impartiality, prioritize the fundamental interests of the Palestinian people and the countries of the region and take practical steps to advance the Middle East peace process.

Palestine is facing existential and development challenges. The international community should take concrete action to help Palestinians fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, develop the economy and improve people's livelihoods, with a view to achieving economic independence at an early date.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has made positive contributions to improving humanitarian conditions for Palestinian refugees. The international community should consolidate its political support for the Agency and make effective efforts to ease its financial problems. COVID-19 vaccines, as part of an aid package from China to the Agency, have recently arrived in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon to be used to vaccinate Palestinian refugees in those countries.

I would like to conclude by reiterating China's support for the establishment of a fully sovereign

and independent Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel, and our support for the Arab people and Jewish people developing alongside each other. We also underline our support for the common development of both Arabs and Jews. China will continue to play a constructive role alongside the international community with the aim of achieving a settlement of the Palestinian question as soon as possible.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his report on the situation in the Middle East.

Concern is growing about yet another escalation in tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories thanks to a recurrence of acts of violence, primarily in Jerusalem, in connection with the oppression of Christian and Muslim believers and the restriction of their access to the holy sites. We want to point out once again that it is unacceptable to violate the historical and legal status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem and we emphasize the stabilizing role played by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is historically responsible for their protection.

In parallel, the Israeli authorities are conducting direct military actions and operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the most recent of which ended in the tragic death of the Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. In that regard, we support the Palestinian leadership's demand that a thorough and objective investigation into the circumstances of her death be carried out.

It is clear from the Special Coordinator's briefing that the already explosive situation is being exacerbated by the illegal, unilateral steps taken by Tel Aviv to create irreversible realities on the ground. Over the past year, more than 12,000 housing units were approved through the expansion of existing settlements and the construction of new ones, while more than 1,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished. The confiscation of land and forced evictions of Palestinian families continue, and olive groves are being cut down. There has been an increase in settler attacks, as well as in the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military. Against that backdrop, Tel Aviv's intention to double the number of Israelis living in the Jordan Valley and the Syrian Golan Heights by 2026 can be

regarded as a de facto annexation of a large area of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The international community is virtually ignoring those systematic violations of the rights of the Palestinians, which clearly reflects the double standards of Western countries where the provisions of international humanitarian law and the protection of human rights are concerned. We are seeing the same thing in relation to the situation in Donbas. It is also regrettable that a number of our Western colleagues do not shy away from using other matters to divert the attention of the international community from the sabotage of the Israeli-Palestinian settlement. We heard the United States representative once again tell the tired old story that the global food crisis is Russia's fault. We would ask the United States to stop trying to mislead everyone and to remove the sanctions it imposed through its own volition and which are hindering the distribution of food. The world will breathe a sigh of relief.

In the current context, we consider our primary task to be achieving real stability on the ground and restoring the political horizon so as to revive the Middle East peace process on the basis of the internationally recognized terms of reference, whose central element is a two-State solution. At the same time, we firmly believe that a settlement is possible only through the launch of direct negotiations between the parties. In that context, the restoration of inter-Palestinian unity through the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization is vital. We welcome and support Egypt's corresponding initiatives aimed at establishing a dialogue between the major political forces in Palestine, as well as Algeria's plans to host the next round of talks between representatives of Fatah and Hamas. Our proposal for holding the next inter-Palestinian meeting in Moscow still stands.

For our part, we continue to cooperate with the Palestinians and Israelis, as well as all interested international and regional players that are ready to work together within the framework of the Middle East Quartet. We would like to note the importance of coordinating international mediators with regional partners directly interested in achieving a Middle East settlement. That is what prompted Russia's initiative to hold a broader ministerial meeting of the Middle East Quartet with key members of the League of Arab States. However, we consider the United States' desire to monopolize the peace process and impose

so-called economic peace on the Palestinians, rather than meeting their legitimate aspirations to create their own independent State, to be counterproductive, as is Washington's unwillingness to join the activities of the Quartet of international mediators.

Given the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, it is vital to ensure that the effective efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continue to provide comprehensive humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to the Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. We call on international donors to give the Agency's work more active support, considering that it has been the main international structure providing assistance to Palestinians in the areas of education, health care, social support, infrastructure and living conditions in refugee camps since 1949.

In that context, the Western organizers' decision not to invite Russia to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians is baffling. Russia has played an active role in the Committee's work on an ongoing basis since it was founded in 1993 and has made a significant and recognized contribution to creating a solid foundation for the implementation of a solution involving two States, Israel and Palestine. It is clear that this position has nothing to do with a genuine quest to find solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Any attempt to exclude Russia from the process of resolving the Palestinian question, the situation in Syria or any other Middle East crisis would be counterproductive. Russia and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa share deep, stable and undeniable historical ties untainted by a legacy of colonialism, unlike the case with Western States. We intend to continue making an active contribution to resolving the acute conflicts in that part of the world and strengthening mutually beneficial relations with all the countries of the region, which represent a vital element of a multipolar world.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank Mr. Wennesland for his sobering briefing earlier and to recognize our Israeli and Palestinian colleagues with us at the table this morning. I particularly wanted to address our civil-society briefers, Ms. Robi Damelin and Mr. Daniel Munayer, to say that their work and their words today deserve our attention. More importantly, they deserve our support. We have listened carefully,

with the empathy that Ms. Damelin asked for, and I would like to say that it is rare to hear such sincere and refreshing briefings at the beginning of a Council debate. I thank the presidency for arranging that.

We have one clear message today, which is to call for urgent de-escalation. All duty-bearers, including the international community, have a role to play.

We must be clear, however, that there are concrete steps that Israel, as the occupying Power, can take to de-escalate the situation. Ireland reiterates the importance of protecting the status of the holy sites in Jerusalem and its full respect for Jordan's custodial role. We share Tor Wennesland's concerns that the forthcoming Jerusalem Day flag march will escalate tensions. We call on all those concerned to ensure that it passes peacefully.

Yet again, Mr. Wennesland has reported on deeply disturbing developments, and Ireland condemns the recent terrorist attacks in Israel, most recently in Elad on 5 May. We have consistently said that there is no justification for terrorism, the victims of which deserve justice. Ireland also condemns all loss of civilian life in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on Israel to address disproportionate security responses, as seen in Jerusalem, Jenin and elsewhere.

We deplore the shocking killing of *Al-Jazeera* journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the excessive use of force by the police at her funeral. We call for a swift and independent investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. Freedom of the media is essential, and journalists must be protected, as affirmed by the Security Council in resolutions 2222 (2015) and 1738 (2006).

Illegal settlement expansion by Israel continues. Ireland condemns the decision of the Israeli Higher Planning Council to advance plans for the construction of more than 4,000 housing units in the West Bank. We urge the Israeli authorities to reverse that decision.

Those settlements clearly violate international law. They undermine prospects for a two-State solution and are a major obstacle to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The latest decision, as well as the demolitions and evictions affecting the Palestinian populations in East Jerusalem and Area C, directly threaten the viability of a future Palestinian State and are underlying causes of tension and violence.

In common with its European Union partners, Ireland is deeply concerned about developments in

Masafer Yatta, which could amount to the forcible transfer of approximately 1,200 Palestinians and the demolition of their homes. Ireland urges Israel to cease evictions and demolitions, including of donor-funded structures, in line with its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law.

The economic situation of the Palestinian people and the fiscal position of the Palestinian Authority remain dire. That has a destabilizing effect. Structural constraints for the sustainable development of the Palestinian economy must be removed. The Palestinian Authority must be further supported in its reform efforts, and the trend of declining donor support must be reversed. Ireland remains deeply concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip and encourages the Israeli authorities to ensure that essential infrastructure projects can resume.

We renew our call on Israel to lift the blockade on the Strip and commend regional partners for their ongoing support. We also commend the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for its support to the Palestinian people in extremely challenging circumstances. In this year's UNRWA mandate renewal, we urge the international community to match the political commitments to Palestine refugees with the funding required for the Agency to carry out its work.

While today our immediate focus is urgent de-escalation, a credible political horizon remains both vital and urgent. Economic and development measures on their own are not sufficient. In order to advance prospects for the resumption of a genuine and inclusive political process, Ireland calls for confidence-building measures. Israel, as the occupying Power, has a particular responsibility — for example, to refrain from the excessive use of administrative detention and release those who continue to be detained without formal charge.

Ireland also reiterates its call for the release of the mortal remains of Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul to their loved ones so that they can have some closure, as well as for the release of the two Israeli civilians detained in the Gaza Strip. Those and other measures could assist with resuming a meaningful political process, without which future generations of Israelis and Palestinians will remain caught in a vicious cycle of occupation and conflict.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his remarks and for being here with us today in person. I also want to thank Robi Damelin and Daniel Munayer for their poignant and thought-provoking remarks.

We remain deeply concerned about the rising tensions, especially in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. It is essential for tensions to be lowered and for the threat posed by extremists to be controlled. The historic status quo of the holy sites must also be upheld. We condemn all acts of terrorism, and all acts of incitement and violence against civilians are unacceptable. In addition, as we have already noted in the Security Council, journalists must be protected. Their work is essential to peace and democracy.

We condemn the killing of *Al-Jazeera* journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and support the call for a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation. The scenes from her funeral procession in Jerusalem were deeply disturbing. Funeral processions must be shown the utmost respect, and civilians must always be protected.

We reiterate our call on the Israeli authorities to halt all settlement expansions, evictions and demolitions. We urge Israel to revoke the plans to demolish several villages in the Masafer Yatta area, which will forcibly evict approximately 1,300 Palestinians. Israel should also refrain from carrying out the announced plans to advance thousands of new housing units in the West Bank.

Norway and the European Union convened the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) on 9 to 10 May in Brussels. The aim of the AHLC is to help build the foundation of a Palestinian State and help realize the two-State solution. Transferring authority to the Palestinian Authority (PA) is a key element of that process.

The AHLC commended the parties for the positive achievements realized since their meeting held in Oslo in November 2021. For example, the pilot for the electronic transfer of value-added tax has been launched. Barriers to trade between Palestine and Jordan are being removed. And access for Palestinians to the Israeli labour market has been increased from both the West Bank and Gaza. There are also new arrangements that provide more water and more wastewater treatment, and more goods are entering and being exported from Gaza.

Those steps are important for the development, economic growth and sustainability of the Palestinian Authority. However, the AHLC is impatient to see more progress. Announcements by the PA of unrealistic wage increases are causing concern and the much-needed reforms aimed at balancing the budget cannot wait any longer.

The PA remains in a deep financial and political crisis. The two parties must further intensify their cooperation to stabilize the Palestinian economy, increase revenues to the PA and facilitate economic growth. Israel must also reduce the restrictions imposed by the occupation, avoid escalatory actions and take more active steps to strengthen the PA.

We call on all the parties to use the constructive spirit built by the AHLC to further address the underlying causes of the conflict and make progress on the political track. A political horizon is urgently needed. Improvement of the economic situation alone will not resolve the conflict. The two-State solution remains the only viable solution to secure the rights, safety and prosperity of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his presence here this morning and for his briefing. I also listened keenly to the observations made by Mr. Daniel Munayer and Ms. Robi Damelin. Constructive inter-ethnic and intercultural grass-roots engagements can, and do, contribute to coexistence despite, and within, the current fragile situation.

The implications of the escalating acts of violence in the past few months in Tel Aviv, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in Jenin are still being felt on the ground, as indicated by Special Coordinator Wennesland, at an extremely high cost to both Palestinian and Israeli lives. In view of the upcoming 28-29 May Jerusalem Day events, we urge all parties to exercise restraint in both action and rhetoric before, during and after the events.

We also call on all parties involved to continue affirming in word and demonstrating in action that the status quo of Jerusalem continues to be maintained.

Kenya welcomed the Council's recent press statement on the killing of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh (SC/14891). As we join in the call for an immediate, thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into her killing, we urge that the process does not lose sight of the contextual issues in which such tragic events continue to occur.

Kenya welcomes any constructive and practical steps that seek to secure the full implementation of the Council's resolutions. Those include any efforts, whether at the official or the grass-roots level, that contribute to the creation of a conducive environment for a negotiated peaceful settlement, including the final-status negotiations, and the actualization of the two-State solution with a viable Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines.

It is for that reason that we continue to condemn actions and entities that weaken the path to stabilization and enhance negative trends on the ground. The continuing attacks and inciteful rhetoric by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and affiliated militias underscore not only the destabilizing effect of terrorism, but also that terrorists and militias are actors with no incentive to consider or engage in the peace agenda. As we have stated before, the Council needs to go beyond condemnation of such acts and reinforce facilitation and capability mechanisms to address their continuing entrenchment and destructive operations.

High-level outreach and engagement by the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Coordinator with the top officials of the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and key neighbouring States, including Jordan and Egypt, will continue to remain critical. The important work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force also remains vital to the stability of the subregion.

The 12 May decision by the Israeli authorities to advance plans for more than 4,000 housing units in the West Bank is concerning. As we have stated before, the advancement of settlements, the increasing settler population and clashes, arbitrary displacements and forced evictions, including the recent decision by the Israeli High Court regarding the Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta, will continue to create a hurdle for the path of peace and the normalization of relations between Israelis and Palestinians. We call for the cessation of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in line with obligations under international law.

Inasmuch as peacebuilding is a rare terminology when it comes to the peace and security efforts in the Middle East, we encourage more focus on efforts that contribute to conflict prevention, mediation and recovery efforts and that address critical challenges,

such as State fragility and socioeconomic development in both Gaza and the West Bank.

The meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians held in Brussels earlier this month under Norway's leadership is an important platform for such conversations. We welcome the high-level participation by both the Palestinian Authority and Israeli officials and note that the meeting touched on strengthened cooperation on various critical issues, including water, energy, trade and the overall improvement of the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority.

Kenya looks forward to localized, sustainable and tangible outcomes from such meetings and strengthened synergies among peace, security and peacebuilding when it comes to the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Coordinator, Robi Damelin and Daniel Munayer for their insightful and powerful briefings. Sadly, the world's attention has been drawn repeatedly to the fragile situation in the Middle East this month.

We started with an appalling terror attack on innocent Israeli citizens in Elad as they celebrated their Independence Day. Our thoughts remain with the three victims and their families. We condemn the recent attacks against Israelis in the strongest possible terms, and reaffirm that the United Kingdom stands with Israel in the face of terrorism and violence.

We then witnessed the tragic killing of the veteran Palestinian-American Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin and the deeply disturbing scenes of the disproportionate use of force by Israeli police at her funeral. We urge a swift, transparent and impartial investigation into those events and meaningful accountability.

The United Kingdom is a strong defender of media freedom. The work of journalists across the globe is vital, and they must be protected when carrying out their critical work.

We also saw the advancement of more than 4,000 settlement units in the West Bank and the increased risk of eviction of more than 1,000 Palestinians in Masafer Yatta. We are clear that, in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, settlements, demolitions and forced evictions are illegal under international humanitarian law. We call on the Israeli Government to halt all

settlement expansion and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This ongoing cycle of violence only moves us further away from the peaceful solution that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve. We urge the parties to return to dialogue and take urgent steps to make progress towards peace.

We saw evidence of the value of dialogue and collaboration at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, chaired by Norway, in Brussels this month. We were pleased to see commitments from the parties to advancing economic cooperation. The United Kingdom is fully supporting those efforts and is ready to support further. To be clear, we believe momentum on economic issues must be in tandem with political commitment to make progress towards peace. We reaffirm, as we did with our partners at the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers meeting this month, our commitment to a negotiated two-State solution, which envisions both Israel and a viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing and his continued efforts in fulfilling his mandate.

Every time we meet on this issue, we look for good and positive news from the Middle East. It does not come often, but it does, such as the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in Brussels. We support calls for a more strategic approach to address the Palestinian Authority's economic and fiscal crisis.

We also welcome the increase in the number of work permits as part of recent Israeli decisions to make improvements to access and movement. Such initiatives contribute to improving Palestinian livelihoods and easing tensions. They help to build confidence and trust among the parties.

But they should also be sustained and become irreversible. Increasing economic integration requires updating the regulatory framework governing the relationship between the Israeli and Palestinian economies in order to avoid exacerbating asymmetries that are there.

We are deeply troubled by recent developments marred by tension and violence. We strongly condemn

the murder of Israeli citizens in terrorist attacks. Such despicable acts undermine trust, polarize communities and reverse gains. Like every country, Israel has the right to defend itself against terror through proportionate action.

We condemn in the strongest terms incitements to violence, such as the recent one from Hamas' leader in Gaza, who called on Palestinians to commit attacks using a "cleaver, ax or knife". We urge Palestinian Authority leaders to be the first to denounce such unacceptable postures. Violence only begets more violence, in a never-ending cycle, feeding only extremist ideas.

We are shocked and saddened by the killing the Al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin. We urge both Palestinian and Israeli authorities to cooperate on carrying out a thorough, fair and impartial investigation so as to ensure accountability, as called for by the Council. Unfortunately, Shireen Abu Akleh is not the first journalist to be killed, but we fervently hope that she will be the last to lose her life in the line of duty. We must do everything in our power to protect journalists in their noble mission of pursuing the truth and informing the public.

We have time and again called on the parties to avoid any action that may undermine efforts, however timid, towards understanding. We have seen it so many times: it takes a great deal of effort to build trust, and it takes only a second to destroy months and even years of effort, and bring back tension and violence with their painful toll in human lives. Parties should resist and refrain from any acts that push the two-State solution away.

The opponents of peace on both sides would use every occasion to bring and maintain the Middle East peace process to an unsustainable impasse. We are concerned about the announcement of plans for building new settlements and the court decision to evict more Palestinians from their homes. All of that is wrong. Settlements are illegal under international law.

These unilateral actions further undermine trust between Palestinians and Israelis, without which peaceful coexistence is impossible. They shatter hopes for the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State that lives in peace with a democratic Israel. We urge both parties to continue their close contacts and cooperation in as many areas as possible to help break and reverse the trend of vicious cycles that widen the gap between them.

People are tired of endless cycles of tensions and violence. They need perspective and visibility. As we heard today, they need hope to project and build their futures. We have seen so often before that low-intensity violence can erupt in a major conflagration of violence, which takes everyone back to square one, squandering years of tireless efforts to bring the parties closer together. This requires patience, wisdom, vision and leadership.

It also requires time, because time loses its meaning if it is not properly or purposefully used. We were heartened by the accounts from the civil society representatives, Ms. Damelin and Mr. Munayer, in particular their vision and efforts aimed at reconciliation. What we heard from them is not only a wish but a real contribution for change, understanding and peace. And, yes, peace is made with hope, through daily efforts on the ground, in the neighbourhood, through people-to-people contacts, by knowing and accepting others by coming together.

There is no alternative to peace through negotiations, which is the only way to advance towards the resolution of the longest conflict in modern history, where Israelis and Palestinians can enjoy their equal rights and freedoms in peace and prosperity.

Mr. Asokan (India): I thank the United Nations Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, Mr. Daniel Munayer and Ms. Robi Damelin for their briefings.

The events during the holy period of Ramadan have illustrated the potential volatility surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem. Provocative actions or rhetoric must be avoided, and the historic and legal status quo in the holy sites in the city must be respected and fully preserved. A concerted diplomatic effort is also required to deal with the root causes of the recent tensions and ensure that the situation does not deteriorate again.

Violent attacks and the killing of civilians have continued in Palestine and Israel. We strongly condemn such acts, which have resulted in an increasingly high number of casualties, including women and children. Immediate steps must be taken to ensure the complete cessation of violence. Resolution 2334 (2016) calls upon parties to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, and to refrain from provocative acts of incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Any action that unduly alters the status quo on the ground and undercuts the viability of the two-State solution must be eschewed.

We are following the developments in Masafer Yatta with concern. Tensions have risen over the potential legal eviction of the Palestinian families in the area, which includes children. We appeal for the status quo to be maintained in Masafer Yatta, in the interests of peace and stability.

The continued precarious financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains another matter of concern, as the Agency's lack of funding can adversely affect the delivery of humanitarian services to the Palestinian refugee community in Palestine and elsewhere. In this regard, we welcome the convening of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the announcement of voluntary contributions to the Agency in June. We hope that the international community will pledge adequate funding to help UNRWA overcome the financial crisis. Over the last four years, India contributed \$20 million to the Agency, and it has also pledged another \$5 million for UNRWA's programme budget for the year 2022.

Recent incidents have underscored that the security challenges could quickly reverse any gains made in the socioeconomic sectors unless there is a political dialogue between Israel and Palestine. An early return to the peace process by launching credible direct negotiations, while addressing the security and economic challenges, is an immediate necessity.

India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine based on the internationally agreed framework, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns. The absence of direct negotiations is not conducive to securing long-term peace and will only increase the risk of recurrence and escalation of violence.

Let me conclude by reiterating India's firm and unwavering commitment to the two-State solution and the peaceful resolution of the Palestine question. India has always supported a negotiated two-State solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

We call on the United Nations and the international community to prioritize reviving peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. India stands ready to support all international efforts aimed at achieving

a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

Mrs. Gasri (France) (*spoke in French*): I join others in thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing, and Ms. Robi Damelin and Mr. Daniel Munayer for their respective testimonies and courageous efforts for peace.

I would like to stress three points. First, France strongly condemns the terrorist attacks that have hit Israel in recent weeks. We will never compromise on Israel's security.

Secondly, France is concerned about the continuing deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories. The multiplication of facts on the ground is making the prospect of a two-State solution ever-more remote, even though it remains the only one capable of bringing about a just and lasting solution in the quest for peace.

Together with our European partners, we have expressed our deep concern about the decision of the Israeli authorities to move forward with plans to build more than 4,000 housing units in many West Bank settlements. We have called on them to reverse this decision, which is a flagrant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace, and we now reiterate this call.

The recent Israeli Supreme Court decision paves the way for the eviction of more than a thousand Palestinians in Masafer Yatta, including more than 500 children, which, if these orders are implemented, would be the largest forced transfer since 1967. We therefore call on Israel not to proceed with the demolitions and evictions of Palestinians, including in Masafer Yatta, as such acts would run counter to international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Thirdly, France remains concerned about the significant risk of escalation. The Security Council has strongly condemned the death of Shireen Abu Akleh while she covered an operation conducted by Israeli security forces in Jenin. A transparent investigation must be carried out as soon as possible, and those responsible must be held to account. We also reiterate our dismay at the unacceptable violence perpetrated during her funeral at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Jerusalem, which is under French protection.

We also call for the utmost restraint in Jerusalem on the occasion of the holding of the flag march to be

held next Sunday. A revision of the route of the march would be appropriate with a view to reducing tensions. It is also necessary to preserve the historical status quo of the holy sites, and we recall Jordan's special role in that respect.

There is an urgent need to restore the political horizon for the relaunching of negotiations on the basis of the agreed parameters, relevant Council resolutions and international law. The Council obviously has a role to play and must encourage the parties to return to the path of dialogue. In that regard, we welcome the constructive discussions between the parties at the most recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, and we hope that they will lead to tangible results and political momentum.

France remains determined to work towards the revival of the Middle East peace process. We will also continue to support the Palestinian people and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as Palestinian civil society, in the face of the many challenges yet to be overcome.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his comprehensive briefing and his tireless efforts to calm the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We also thank Mr. Daniel Munayer and Ms. Robi Damelin for their impactful briefings and all their critical efforts to support reconciliation between the two sides.

The current situation is marked by high tensions and characterized by uncertainty. Amid continued provocations and the accompanying deterioration of the humanitarian, security and political conditions, there are grave concerns regarding potential escalations in the upcoming period that could prove difficult to control. In response to those developments, we must consider formulating short-, medium- and long-term solutions. In that regard, we would like to highlight the following points.

First, all parties have a responsibility to exercise restraint, reduce tensions and refrain from any steps that might inflame the situation on the ground, especially around the holy sites in the city of Jerusalem. As a top priority, the continual confrontations in the cities of the West Bank must be stopped.

The killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and the subsequent responses at both the local and international levels confirm the fragility of the current situation. It also sheds further light on the impact of the conflict, which continues to result in a human toll among innocent civilians, especially women and children. The Security Council press statement on the killing of Ms. Abu Akleh (SC/14891) confirms the current consensus that it is necessary to closely monitor the situation, underlining the need to urgently address such serious developments.

In that regard, we reiterate our strong condemnation of that killing, as well as the importance of an impartial, independent and transparent investigation into her death. We also believe that necessary measures must be taken to ensure the non-recurrence of such incidents in future so as to protect the lives of innocent people and journalists during conflicts, in line with international law.

Similarly, the recent decision to force more than 1,000 Palestinians to leave their homes in Masafer Yatta, located in the south of the West Bank, will further exacerbate security and humanitarian conditions for the population. Not only is that an illegal practice but it also undermines peace efforts and should therefore be halted.

Secondly, we must take urgent and proactive measures in the Council to help maintain calm and prevent another cycle of conflict. It is necessary to intensify contacts and diplomatic endeavours with and between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to discuss ways of restoring calm and building confidence between them.

In particular, local and regional coordination should be strengthened to maintain the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. In that context, we stress the important role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the custodian of the city's Islamic and Christian holy sites.

While we seek to rectify the current situation, our attention should not be distracted from the political process, which is suffering from a prolonged stalemate and requires serious steps forward to be taken. In that regard, it is possible to reactivate several international initiatives that have sought to catalyse dialogue between the two parties during the past few years. The primary goal for all must be the return of the parties to direct and serious negotiations that lead to a political settlement

based on the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Thirdly, we underscore the need to address the difficult humanitarian conditions facing the Palestinian people, especially given the increasing levels of food insecurity due to inflation and rising global food prices. Both sides must be encouraged to reach understandings that improve the economic and living conditions of the Palestinian people.

In that context, we welcome Israel's decisions to ease the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians and to approve additional work permits. We look forward to building on those steps, which are necessary to improve the worsening conditions, in order to contribute to confidence-building and the creation of an environment conducive to achieving peace in the region.

We also underscore the important role of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, chaired by Norway, in promoting economic development efforts in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, we stress that the time has come to take courageous political steps to spare the Palestinian and Israeli peoples from any further suffering.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his informative briefing. I also wish to thank Mr. Daniel Munayer and Ms. Robi Damelin for their moving testimonies. I welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

The death of American-Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on 11 May was truly a tragedy, which was exacerbated by the indecent acts of violence at her funeral, when the procession was interrupted by incidents that represented an attack on dignity and respect for the dead. We were deeply shocked and saddened by that series of events and wish to condemn them. We call for an independent investigation to shed light on the exact circumstances surrounding the tragedy and to establish responsibility. That crime must not go unpunished.

Human suffering does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, religion, culture, skin colour, geography or ideology. The heartfelt appeals just made by Ms. Robi Damelin and Mr. Daniel Munayer call on our humanity and for the need to shed our preconceived ideas and act without delay, with hope as our guide. The suffering that has become the daily lot of the Palestinian population does not spare Israeli families. In the face of such suffering, our humanity cannot remain indifferent.

Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who was kidnapped only hours after the declaration in August 2014 of the ceasefire negotiated by the United Nations and the parties concerned, represents another dimension of the same human suffering and indiscriminate violence that characterizes the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Almost eight years later, neither his remains nor any sign of life has been sent to his family, which is losing hope of even giving him a proper burial.

The issues relating to the identification and return to families of human remains are critical for both sides, as they contribute to establishing an environment of trust between the parties, which is essential to building peace. It goes without saying that the return of bodies is a major point of disagreement between the two communities, given that the remains of victims killed in various security incidents are being withheld by the belligerents in violation of international humanitarian law. That issue is especially sensitive as it concerns respect for funeral rites, which are an integral part of the culture and identity of both parties.

The continuing human suffering of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples is the responsibility of everyone—the parties to the conflict and the international community. The flagrant violations with impunity of Security Council resolutions do not contribute to calming the situation. Pursuing the policy of expanding illegal settlements, demolishing homes and evicting families is increasing the volatility of the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Approximately 1,200 people, including 580 children, are currently at risk of forced eviction and the loss of their property, livelihoods and access to water and sanitation and education facilities.

The situation is all the more worrisome in the light of the current humanitarian crisis observed on the ground. We note with interest the visit to the region of the delegation led by the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator, Samer Abdel Jaber, to meet with Palestinian residents who are at risk of forcible transfer.

Gabon calls on the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to show restraint and commit to taking confidence-building measures to give peace a better chance. Today more than ever, there is a need to strengthen regional and multilateral cooperation with a view to resolving the conflict, which has caused untold suffering to the civilian populations for too long. In that regard, we welcome the recent visit by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey to Israel and Palestine.

We call on the Middle East Quartet to step up its efforts to encourage the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resume, in good faith, an inclusive dialogue, in which all segments of society, including women, should participate. The establishment of the State of Palestine is an essential step to bringing the peace process to a successful conclusion, which will have an overarching impact on the entire region.

We reaffirm our full support for the two-State solution. Gabon hopes that the rapid resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will achieve a real and lasting peace, based on respect for the principles agreed by the parties and in keeping with the provisions of international law.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for Special Coordinator Wennesland and his tireless efforts to bring the conflict to a peaceful conclusion and reaffirm our vision of a two-State solution that requires the firm political will and commitment of the parties, as well as the engagement of the international community, including regional actors.

Mr. Ochoa Martínez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I am grateful for the briefings by Special Coordinator Wennesland and the very moving presentations by Ms. Damelin and Mr. Munayer. I also welcome the presence of the delegations of Israel and Palestine.

Given what we have just heard, the need to end the cycle of violence is clear. Concerning the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin on 11 May, Mexico reiterates its condemnation of attacks against civilians, including journalists and media personnel, and urges the promotion and protection of freedom of the press and the right to access information, in accordance with resolution 2222 (2015). Mexico demands an immediate, thorough and independent investigation of the incident, offers its condolences and deplores the violence that took place at her funeral.

My country also condemns the launching of rockets from Gaza and attacks against Israeli citizens, the most recent of which took place in Elad and resulted in the death of three people. Those incidents have added to a growing list of such attacks this year alone. We join Ms. Damelin in what she said earlier. We urge Israeli and Palestinian religious, political and social leaders to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and incitement.

Concerning the announcement by the Israeli Government of the construction of 4,000 new housing units in the West Bank, we stress that the continued expansion of Israeli settlements restricts the freedom of movement, dispossesses the Palestinian population of its natural resources and territory, runs contrary to international law and constitutes an obstacle to achieving peace. We call for ending settlement expansion.

Similarly, we are deeply concerned about the Israeli Supreme Court ruling of 4 May upholding the legality of the forcible transfer of 1,200 Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta. Such a ruling constitutes a violation of residents' rights and sets a dangerous precedent as it contravenes international legal obligations.

Despite each one of those challenges, we welcome the recent meeting held by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, chaired by Norway. We acknowledge the assistance provided by the donors to the Palestinian Authority. We also welcome the economic development measures promoted by Israel for Gaza. However, they are not sufficient to address the grave humanitarian situation and it is therefore imperative to lift the blockade of the Strip.

We note the precarious financial situation of the Palestinian Authority, which continues to worsen. We call on the Palestinian Authority to implement pending reforms that will enable it to reduce its fiscal deficit.

In conclusion, Mexico reaffirms its position in support of a two-State solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and allows for the establishment of a sovereign, politically and economically independent Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Mrs. Hackman (Ghana): Let me first thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing on the

overall volatile situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, as well as for highlighting the measures being taken to restore calm and work towards a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are also grateful to Ms. Robi Damelin, of the Parents Circle-Families Forum, and Mr. Daniel Munayer, Executive Director of Musalaha, whose personal experiences, as we heard, reinforce the need for a peaceful settlement and reconciliation between the two peoples. We welcome the participation of the Israeli and Palestinian representatives in this meeting.

The collective aspiration of the Security Council for Israel and Palestine to live peacefully, side by side as two sovereign States within secure borders and with a shared capital in Jerusalem, should not be obscured by the highly degenerative environment witnessed in recent months. Rather, the Security Council, working in concert with regional actors, must seek to play an enhanced role in reinvigorating the Middle East peace process, with a view to stemming the rising violence and moving on to facilitate a renewed and constructive dialogue on a political horizon that would ultimately lead to the two-State solution.

We join the international community in expressing our strong discontent over the killing of the Palestinian-American journalist Ms. Shireen Abu Akleh, who was fatally shot in the line of duty in Jenin, and we deeply regret the disruption of her funeral procession, which turned an otherwise solemn ceremony into yet another scene of pandemonium. We offer our sincerest condolences to her family and loved ones. Like civilians, the killing of journalists in conflict situations constitutes a fundamental breach of the rules of international humanitarian law, for which there must be accountability.

We note with concern the continuing confrontations and violent clashes at Jerusalem's holy sites. While urging religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among worshippers of the different faiths, we stress the need for the legal and historical status quo to be upheld.

We urge restraint from unilateral actions that threaten the peace and obliterate the possibility of the two-State solution in the future.

The recent spate of terrorist attacks, which continue to ramp up the death toll of innocent civilians, remains a source of concern. We condemn, in particular, the 5 May attack that occurred in the central Israeli city of Elad, killing three Israelis and leaving four others wounded,

following the celebration of Israel's independence. The canker of terrorism that plagues Israel and Palestine can be eliminated only through a coordinated response that addresses the root causes.

We have further taken note of the mounting economic difficulties arising from insufficient revenue and an increased absence of donor funding. The International Monetary Fund has detailed the Palestinian economy as having a dire outlook and requiring transformational reform with efforts from the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the donor community. We therefore welcome the ongoing support extended by the Israeli Government, including the increase in the number of work permits issued to Gaza residents, trade measures and infrastructure projects. In that regard, we also welcome the further commitments made by donors within the framework of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians held in Brussels this month and commend the leadership of Norway, the European Union and the United States.

We highlight the plight of the 5.5 million registered Palestinian refugees in the expectation that increased funding support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will be realized during the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for the purpose of announcing voluntary commitments, to be held on 23 June.

We encourage the leadership of the Palestinian Authority to work with the Israeli Government towards the return of all fallen Israeli soldiers, including Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, as part of the process to build confidence and enhance dialogue for peace.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Ghana's commitment to continuing to support a meaningful peace process, which would eventually provide the framework for the prosperity of the peoples of Israel and Palestine and for the peace of the wider Middle East region.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his comprehensive updates provided to the Council today. I thank the other briefers for their informative and compelling accounts. My delegation welcomes the representatives of Israel and Palestine to this meeting.

Brazil remains concerned about the situation of recurrent violence, including in and around holy sites in Jerusalem, as well as the series of attacks perpetrated

against Israeli civilians. We are concerned that the events planned for next week might further worsen this already tense situation.

We reiterate that refraining from incitement and inflammatory rhetoric is of the utmost importance, as is the proactive engagement of political, religious and community leaders to restore calm. Places of worship, especially a place of such religious significance as the Holy Esplanade, must not be battlegrounds.

The safety and security of religious sites is an essential component of freedom of religion or belief and should be preserved at all costs. Brazil is also concerned about attempts to challenge the historic and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Upholding the status quo is fundamental, as is maintaining the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's special role as the custodian of the Muslim holy places.

Brazil profoundly laments the death of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while reporting from the West Bank, and we support the calls for accountability. Full, transparent and independent investigations should be undertaken with the cooperation of all parties involved.

There can be no justification for any attacks against journalists or media workers. They are considered civilians under international humanitarian law and must be protected, as reiterated by resolution 2222 (2015), unanimously adopted by the Council.

The work of journalists, such as Ms. Abu Akleh, is indispensable to preserving the fundamental right to freedom of expression and to the free flow of independent and accurate information in times of peace or war.

The episodes of violence and excessive use of force during her funeral were also disturbing. In that regard, Brazil recognizes Israeli efforts, through the local police, to investigate the facts and ensure accountability for those responsible.

As we are all aware by now, spiking international prices for food is impacting humanitarian assistance efforts everywhere. Without additional funding, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will not be able to maintain their regular humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees, which can have a destabilizing impact on the ground. Brazil supports the many ongoing efforts

to raise the funds necessary for UNRWA to continue to fulfil its indispensable role. As Mr. Wennesland has warned, lack of humanitarian assistance can have a destabilizing impact on the ground, diminishing the already dim prospects for peace.

Continuing to act proactively in the search for lasting peace in the Middle East is not optional for the Security Council; rather, it remains an imperative. We urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to engage with each other, be it directly or through the mediation instruments offered by the United Nations and by regional partners.

The current situation is the result of years of frustration with the lack of progress in finding a lasting solution to the conflict. Returning to a credible political process within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution is a priority shared by all, and the Security Council should spare no effort in promoting it.

The President: I would like to again draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to congratulate again the United States for its presidency of the Council and for convening today's briefing. Allow me also to thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing and unstinting efforts for peace, and to acknowledge the briefers, Ms. Robi Damelin and Mr. Daniel Munayer, for being with us. I also thank them for their contribution. I totally agree with Ms. Robi when she calls on the Security Council to come and see the situation on the ground. The Council, which is involved in deliberating on the question of Palestine every month, should go and see reality on the ground. I totally agree with Ms. Damelin, and I hope that the Security Council will listen to her call. Words aim to convey a reality to those who do not witness that reality. I fear that words, repeated time after time, may lose some of their power. I therefore urge Council members to look at the realities these words describe.

When we speak of forcible displacement, imagine a family living every single day in fear of being uprooted from its home, the nightmares that haunt a child, the ache a powerless parent feels. As we speak, 1,200

people, including 500 children, are going through this in Masafer Yatta. The reason given by Israel is that the area has been designated as a firing zone for military training — a firing zone — as if they needed more training in how to kill us. The real reason is to seize a maximum amount of Palestinian land with a minimum number of Palestinians living on it. The real reason is annexation and colonialism.

When we speak of extrajudicial killing and the targeting of civilians, imagine raising children, seeing them grow, developing their personality and formulating their dreams, while living with the fear that any day might be their last. Imagine being the parents of Ghaith Yameen, a 16-year-old old boy who, at his young age, had already written down what should be done if he were to die. Imagine how it would feel once his premonition became reality after occupation forces shot him in the back of his head. His testament was this:

“If I were to die, do not put me in the freezer: I never liked the cold. Find a place to bury me alongside other kids: I do not like to be alone. Come visit me and talk to me: I will be listening. And do not cry: I do not want for anybody to be sad or cry because of me.”

Our children are being killed, arrested, displaced and harassed every day. The Council must protect them from a war waged against one Palestinian generation after another.

Speaking of colonial settlements, imagine that in whatever direction Palestinians look, they see armed settlers and occupation forces, and they wake up and see settlements being built on their land where they are forbidden to build. They see one family after another being uprooted from their ancestral homes. And they go to sleep, knowing their houses might be next. Israel pursues annexation thousands of settlement units at a time.

We have been facing aggression, annexation and occupation for decades. Our people have been victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity for decades. What will the international community do about it? What will it you do about it, Madam President? When should we expect the next shipment of weapons to help us defend ourselves and our country? What is the next batch of sanctions that will be enacted? When is the next visit of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and how many dozen investigators should we expect? When is the next summit on accountability,

and should we expect even more pledges of infinite resources and political will to hold Israel accountable?

This is the reality our people endure every day: forcible displacement and replacement, dispossession, denial of rights, discrimination and death, from the day they are born to the day they die, and beyond. And they try to find life somewhere in between and succeed. But there are no consequences for those inflicting such pain and suffering on millions of people.

Why do those who condemn Israeli actions shield them from the consequences? And how do they believe that Israel would ever change its behaviour as long as they do shield them? Business as usual by the international community means colonialism and apartheid as usual by Israel.

Shireen was an exceptional human being, but her killing is unfortunately not an exception. She kept telling the stories of her people, hoping that by making them known she would somehow help alter the course of history. She was killed because she never abandoned this belief, even though, regardless of how many times she told that story, it kept happening again and again, one child at a time, one home at a time, one acre of land at a time. Shireen’s killing is the story — the same story she was telling. The difference is that this time the world knew the victim.

We are not being killed because of what we do, but because of who we are. We are not being killed by mistake, but as part of a grand design aimed at making sure that we all understand no one is safe, so that we all live with fear in our hearts and surrender. There is no immunity for a Palestinian journalist, a president, a health worker, a United Nations staff member, a farmer, a child, a baby, a pregnant mother, an elderly person, a professor, a dual citizen, a Minister, an officer or a judge. If you are a Palestinian, you are a legitimate target, and Israel can decide if you get to live or die. There is no immunity for any Palestinian and full impunity for every Israeli. And yet some are worried about Israeli security, when not a single Palestinian enjoys safety anywhere.

Council members were outraged when Israel attacked Shireen’s funeral. They were distressed and surprised. Well, Israel attacked another funeral a couple of days later. The Israeli war against Palestinians does not stop at death.

Israel often speaks of the need to release withheld Israeli bodies, calling the practice of withholding

bodies barbaric. It does so while withholding the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians, some of which have been detained for decades. This practice deprives their loved ones from the ability to bury them in dignity. They must be remembered.

Shireen's killing was not an exception. Israel was prompt to accuse the victim, instead of taking responsibility for a long-standing shoot-to-kill policy that found its ultimate expression in the killing of Shireen. The Security Council rightly called for accountability, but Israel has enjoyed impunity for so long that it does not know what the hell the Council is talking about. What Israel fails to grasp is that, while this has been its policy for decades, the Palestinians are still there fighting to live in freedom and dignity on their ancestral lands.

Shireen is the story. It is a story of resilience and determination against all odds. It is a story of triumph, even in death. Her people mourned and honoured her, and they buried her in her hometown, Jerusalem, our capital, regardless of how many crimes Israel commits. Those carrying her coffin were ready to be harmed, and they did not drop it. They prevailed over fear and death, just as she did.

We want peace for ourselves and for others. But we will not surrender, as there cannot be peace between a prisoner and a jailer. We want freedom, we deserve freedom, and we are entitled to freedom. Supporting our quest for freedom is the duty of all members of the Council; it is the only path to peace. We are choosing the peaceful path. We ask that the Security Council help us to prove that that path leads to freedom.

Often in the halls of the United Nations, I hear about all the obstacles to achieving peace. Let us take a step in the right direction and then another, and then peace will be within reach. I ask the Council to take a step in support of Palestinian freedom, recognize the State of Palestine, help to consolidate the 1967 borders, including in Jerusalem, assist communities to live and thrive on their land, make sure that there is a cost for Israel for building illegally on our land, and make sure there is none for Palestinians to build on their own land. The Council should take a step to ensure accountability and end impunity, take a step to protect innocent Palestinian civilians being killed every day, and take a step to uphold the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The Security Council spoke in a strong and united manner after the killing of Shireen, condemning the killing and calling for accountability and the protection for journalists. It took a small step in the right direction, which we appreciate and which the family of Shireen appreciates. I talked to her brother just this morning, before coming to the Security Council, and he expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the Council's unified position in condemning the killing of Shireen. Let us take the next step and the next. Let us force Israel to correct its course.

I want to inform the Council that the Prosecutor General of Palestine issued the report on Shireen's assassination today. A copy of that report was shared with the United States Administration. A copy will be shared with Shireen's family and with Al-Jazeera. After we know who assassinated Shireen Abu Akleh, we need to move to hold that person or persons accountable.

In a matter of weeks, Israel announced 4,000 new settlement units and forcible displacement in Masafer Yatta, killed dozens of Palestinians, many of them children, and announced an Israeli flags march in occupied East Jerusalem. The Israeli choice is clear: aggression, annexation and apartheid. Israel will continue spreading fire and complaining about the forest burning. The Security Council can continue trying to extinguish the next fire and the next one and the one after that, or it can stop Israel from setting fire in the first place.

Shireen deserves justice, and our people deserve justice. Our lives matter, our freedom matters, and our dignity matters.

May our dear Shireen rest in peace, and may our people one day live in peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mrs. Furman (Israel): Let me first express my deepest condolences for the tragic murder of innocent children and teachers in Texas. As Israelis, our hearts bleed at the news of this horrific tragedy, and our prayers are with you, Madam President, and with your country, at this very difficult time.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Israel celebrated its seventy-fourth Independence Day. From the north to the south and from the east to the west, Israelis — Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze — celebrated nearly three quarters of a century of independence. Together,

all Israelis were proudly celebrating the vibrant democracy that is Israel and the bounding achievements of a young State.

Yet, tragically, our Independence Day festivities were cut short. In the final hours of one of the most joyous days on Israel's calendar, Oren Ben-Yiftah, Yonatan Habakuk and Boaz Gol were brutally murdered by inhumane Palestinian terrorists wielding axes and knives. These three men were loving fathers, and their murders have left behind 16 orphans — another 16 orphans to be added to the long list of shattered families — widows and orphans, parents and siblings, family and friends — whose loved ones were savagely taken from them by bloodthirsty Palestinian terror.

Since the beginning of 2022, nearly 800 Palestinian terror attacks have been committed against Israelis, in which over 100 were wounded and 19 were murdered. This number cannot be allowed to grow. No more families should endure the gaping hole that a murdered loved one leaves behind.

There is a question that is begging to be asked: what is it that drives a 19-year-old terrorist to take up an axe and murder innocents in cold blood, to hack another human being to death with animal-like brutality? Well, let me tell you, Madam President, the answer is: words — inciteful, hateful venomous words. A mere week before this horrific attack, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, spewed poisoned and called on Palestinian youth, saying,

“whoever does not have a gun should prepare his cleaver, axe or knife to murder Jews”.

Could this be a coincidence? Of course, it is not. The incitement that is spread by Palestinian leadership directly correlates with violent acts of terror perpetrated against Israelis. In fact, just this week, following the non-stop flow of incitement, a Hamas cell was arrested in Jerusalem shortly before it carried out several devastating terror attacks, including a plot to murder a member of Israel's parliament.

The very same incitement that we hear from Hamas leaders is also being spread across the region by the radical Ayatollah regime in Iran, their puppet Hassan Nasrallah and his Iranian-funded terror army, Hizbullah. When calls are made for the destruction of the State of Israel, it is no surprise that terror is on the rise.

But the deep-seated hatred needed to murder is not born overnight; rather, it is the result of decades of incitement. Take, for example, the Palestinian Authority. Its leadership lovingly embraces terrorists while continuing to pay lifelong salaries to their families. An entire generation of Palestinians has grown up on a narrative of hostility. They are taught to hate in their school textbooks, a fact that the European Parliament recently condemned. They are incited by their political leaders. They are fed a narrative that promotes terror, idealizes violence and rewards murderers.

Following the recent brutal terror attack in Tel Aviv in which three Israelis were murdered, Akram Rajoub, the Governor of Jenin, in a personal appointment by President Abbas, labelled the shooter “a Fatah fighter” rather than the terrorist that he was. He even visited the terrorist's family and praised his actions.

Following the terror attack in Bnei Brak, at the end of March, in which three Israelis and two Ukrainians were murdered, Ata Abu Rumeileh, the Fatah secretary in Jenin, called the terrorist “a courageous Fatah leader and a source of inspiration”. Unfortunately, contrary to what was mentioned today in the Council, terror is felt in all Israeli cities, from Be'er Sheva to Tel Aviv, from Elad to Jerusalem. The poison that is rotting the minds of an entire generation, at the hands of both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, is directly causing innocent Israeli blood to be spilled while destroying the future of young Palestinians. That incitement must be condemned.

Nevertheless, I am disturbed to see that not only is that incitement and the lies that support it not condemned; it is also spread, and often, by members of this body.

Throughout the month of Ramadan, more than 1 million Muslims peacefully prayed on the Temple Mount. Yet dozens of Palestinian extremists co-opted that time of peaceful prayer and used it as a pretext to incite violence. While those thugs rioted, threw stones, shot fireworks and hurled firebombs, all from within their houses of prayer, those who had come to pray peacefully were endangered, and Israeli security forces were forced to intervene. Our police acted with exemplary restraint. They protected the people and did precisely their job: they restored law and order.

Yet the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine used Israel's protective measures to fuel and

inflame more incitement and violence. They created a twisted libel blaming Israel for the violence that the terror groups themselves had incited. Many in the international community began spreading those false narratives. By spreading those lies, the international community gave them legitimacy, and, as a result of that unfounded legitimacy, more violence ensued. A vicious cycle was created, a cycle that 19 Israelis paid for with their lives.

To the international community, I will be clear. The time has come to immediately stop adopting the narrative of terrorists before the facts are clear. Member States now have a fresh chance to right that recurring wrong. Next week, as we heard this morning, Israel will be holding its annual flag parade in Jerusalem. That yearly event is a routine, non-violent, non-provocative celebration that has held an unchanged route for more than 30 years, which by no means violates the status quo. Just like all previous years, this year will be no different.

Nevertheless, terror organizations such as Hamas and others are constantly looking for ways to poison their followers so that they wreak havoc and commit acts of terror against Israelis, all for political gain. The Jerusalem flag parade is no different. A peaceful event has been twisted into an attack on Jerusalem by Palestinian terror groups. That could not be further from the truth.

Sadly, that utter distortion of reality does not surprise me. It is expected. What does surprise me is how once again some in the international community are rushing to adopt the sick narrative of terrorists before even hearing out the democratic State of Israel. The flag parade is an act of Israeli pride — pride in our State, pride in our capital and pride in Zionism — yet it has been condemned and deemed as provocation by some Member States. No country in the world would imagine preventing its citizens from marching with the national flag on the streets of its capital city. The double standard is absurd. Israel refuses to capitulate to demands so detached from reality.

Enough is enough. I urge the Council to finally cease and desist from adopting such dangerous narratives. Promoting the lies of Hamas and Hizbullah legitimizes them, and, once they are legitimized, violence will occur. Do not let next week's parade become a pretext for adding more names to the long list of Israeli victims of terror.

All people, whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim or of any other denomination, hold the right to enjoy the holy city of Jerusalem, and that right will always be upheld.

Israel, as a vibrant democracy, is fully committed to the freedom of worship. That was made clear on the Temple Mount, just as it was made clear at the Holy Fire ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in which thousands of Christians participated. Israel does everything and will always do everything to ensure that all religions can pray peacefully and safely at their holy sites. Israel is fully committed to the status quo on the Temple Mount. Nothing will change that.

Despite the incitement, falsehoods and acts of terror, Israel will consistently advance and promote significant measures to benefit the Palestinian people. A record number of Palestinian workers are being allowed into Israel. Joint meetings are being held at the highest level on the topics of defence, health, energy and environmental issues, all in order to map out further collaboration.

Israel is making that effort for the simple reason that we want dialogue. After all, dialogue and cooperation are how one builds trust, and trust is how one builds peace. But that trust-building goes much further than the Palestinians. The Middle East is transforming at lightning speed. In a region where only two years ago Israel had nearly no relations with our neighbours, our circle is partnership is growing, and our collaboration is deepening every single day.

Israel and the United Arab Emirates have concluded negotiations on a free-trade agreement between our nations, but the newfound peace between us goes much further than business ties. It is a deep, people-to-people peace. We are committed to one another on a personal level. That is why it was a given that President Herzog, Israel's highest-ranking official, would be the one to travel to Abu Dhabi to convey Israel's condolences on the passing of Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, of blessed memory. That is what a peace built on trust looks like. But, as I said, our circle of peace is expanding. Just this week, for the first time in 15 years, Turkey's Foreign Minister visited Israel in order to strengthen ties between the Jewish State and yet another Muslim country. That is the future, but, more importantly, that is Israel, a country always striving for peace.

Yet while Israel extends a hand in peace to any willing partner, the Palestinians have proved time and

again that the only hand that they wish to extend is a hand of violence, terror and incitement.

The tragic death of Shireen Abu Akleh was yet another example of placing the blame on Israel before any of the facts were made clear. The narrative of lies spun by the Palestinians placing the blame squarely on Israel's shoulders before an investigation could yield any results politicized a heartbreaking situation.

Therefore, before more lies are spread on the global stage, I would like to make the facts clear. Ms. Abu Akleh lost her life while covering, in real time, the counter-terrorism operation in Jenin, which had been undertaken in the light of the deadly wave of terror attacks against Israel in recent weeks emanating from the Jenin, in attempts to prevent further attacks. During the counter-terrorism operation, Palestinian gunmen fired extensively, recklessly and indiscriminately at Israeli forces.

Following the tragic death of Ms. Abu Akleh, Israel, as a country that views the freedom of the press as of the utmost importance, swiftly called for a joint impartial Israeli-Palestinian investigation to uncover the facts and promote accountability. Israel asked for the bullet in order to conduct a forensic analysis and proposed conducting a joint investigation.

However, the Palestinian Authority has publicly objected all of Israel's offers, choosing instead to act as judge, jury and executioner, while undermining any form of due process or justice. Nevertheless, Israel has conducted a thorough, independent investigation of the incident. What is needed is a transparent joint investigation, and we call on the Palestinian Authority to cooperate in order to get to the truth. The only reason that anyone would refuse a joint investigation is if they had something to hide.

Before I conclude, I must mention once again what I said at the open debate that you, Madam President, organized yesterday (see S/PV.9042). This week I met Leah and Simcha Goldin, the parents of Second Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, who was abducted and

murdered by Hamas in 2014 during the humanitarian ceasefire. I accompanied the Goldin family as it met with Member States to aid them in bringing their son's body home for burial.

But, sadly, the Goldins are not alone. For the past eight years, Hamas has held the bodies of both Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who was abducted and killed a week before Hadar. Moreover, Hamas is holding two Israeli civilians hostage — Avera Mangistu and Hisham Al-Sayed — without disclosing any information on their well-being. Kidnapping by Hamas is not a matter that can be lightly joked about, and we request that Council members treat it as such. This blatant disregard for international law and deliberate targeting of the civilian population must end. It must end now.

The incitement to terror that is claiming the lives of Israelis must be condemned in the strongest terms possible. It must cease, and the Council must not allow such evil to go unchecked. The indoctrination of a generation of Palestinians at the hands of their political, education and religious leaders directly results in bloodshed and cannot continue. But if the Council does not condemn the blatant incitement to terror, I urge that, at the very least, it refrain from spreading or validating the narratives that promote incitement. By repeating the lies spread by terror groups or accepting a narrative fabricated before the facts are even clear, the false legitimacy of the lies is strengthened, and Israelis pay for that with their lives.

The time has come for the Council to take a strong and clear stand against Palestinian incitement. The time has for the Council to aid us in bringing our hostages and the bodies of our soldiers home. We can wait no longer. The time to act is now.

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

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.