



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

*Provisional*

**9425<sup>th</sup>** meeting

Wednesday, 27 September 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hoxha . . . . .	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Ms. Bongo
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Nyarku
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to participate in this meeting

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** Today's briefing is devoted to the twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The reporting period is from 15 June to 19 September.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard. Settlement activity has, nevertheless, continued. Israeli authorities advanced plans for 6,300 housing units in Area C, including the retroactive legalization, under Israeli law, of three outposts near the settlement of Eli. In East Jerusalem, approximately 3,580 housing units were advanced. On 11 September, a plan was advanced for 3,500 housing units, most of which are located in East Jerusalem on land owned by the Greek Orthodox Church. The Church said the units will be for members of the Christian community.

On 18 June, the Israeli Government removed the requirement for ministerial approval at interim stages of settlement planning and delegated that authority to the Additional Minister in the Ministry of Defense, likely expediting settlement expansion.

On 2 August, the Israeli Supreme Court dismissed a petition to dismantle an outpost established in the former settlement of Homesh in the occupied West Bank, evacuated under the 2005 disengagement law. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West

Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced people to demolish 238 structures, displacing 183 people, including 46 women and 91 children. A total of 32 of those structures were donor funded.

On 11 July, Israeli security forces evicted a Palestinian family living in Jerusalem's Old City since the 1950s, handing the property to a settler organization, following a Supreme Court ruling that the property is owned by a Jewish trust, based on Israeli laws that allow only Jews to reclaim property they owned pre-1948. On 17 August, a Palestinian elementary school in Ein Samiya serving nearly 80 pupils was demolished days before the start of the school year. Fifty-nine schools, serving some 6,500 Palestinian students, are at risk of demolition.

In a continuing trend, many Palestinians, including children, left their communities, citing violence by settlers and shrinking grazing land.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction. Unfortunately, daily violence continued. Over the reporting period, 68 Palestinians, including 18 children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks or alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents. A total of 2,830 Palestinians, including 30 women and 559 children, were injured. Of that number, 271 were injured by live ammunition, and 2,119 by tear gas inhalation. In addition, 2 Palestinians were killed and 73 injured, including three women and 12 children, amid a high level of attacks by Israeli settlers. Ten Israelis, including one woman, two children and three Israeli security forces personnel, were killed, and 122 Israelis, including six women and six children, and 33 ISF personnel, were injured by Palestinians in attacks, clashes, stone-throwing and other incidents.

Israeli security forces carried out 1,042 search-and-arrest operations in the West Bank, resulting in 1,504 Palestinians arrested, including 88 children. Israel currently holds 1,264 Palestinians in administrative detention, the highest number in over a decade.

The high number of fatal incidents during the reporting period precludes us from detailing all of them, but allow me to highlight a few. Many Palestinian

casualties in the occupied West Bank occurred in the context of Israeli operations in Area A, including some during subsequent armed clashes with increasingly sophisticated weaponry. On 15 August, in the Aqbat Jabr refugee camp, south of Jericho, two Palestinians, including a 16-year-old boy, were killed by Israeli security forces. Two others were killed on 17 and 22 August, including a 16-year-old boy, in Jenin and the nearby village of Zababida. On 19 September, four Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in the Jenin refugee camp during intensive armed exchanges. Settler-related violence continued throughout the reporting period, including on 4 August, when armed Israeli settlers approached the village of Burqa, near Ramallah, leading to stone-throwing confrontations with Palestinians. Settlers killed a 19-year-old Palestinian and injured another. One Israeli was injured by Palestinians throwing stones. Israeli police arrested two Israelis and placed them under house arrest. In addition, on 27 August, the Israeli settlers burned land south of Nablus and threw stones onto Palestinian houses. Three Israelis, including one woman, were killed by Palestinian gunmen in shooting attacks in the occupied West Bank on 19 and 21 August.

In other incidents, on 15 August, armed Palestinians near Jenin attempted and failed to launch an improvised rocket towards an Israeli settlement in the area. In Gaza, since late August, Palestinians have resumed protests near the perimeter fence. Palestinian protestors have thrown stones and explosive devices towards Israeli security forces and launched incendiary balloons, and Israeli security forces have fired live ammunition and tear gas at protestors, causing casualties.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Unfortunately, such acts continued. In an interview, an Israeli minister said: “my right and that of my wife and my children to travel on the roads in Judea and Samaria is more important than the freedom of movement for Arabs.” A member of the Israeli Knesset said that any “Palestinians running away from an Israel Defense Forces [IDF] soldier must be shot,” adding, that “a Palestinian who approaches an IDF soldier must also be shot”. An Israeli minister visited the holy sites on the Jewish commemoration day of Tisha B’Av and called on Israelis to “return” to the sites and “show our governance”.

In a speech, a senior Palestinian Authority (PA) official said that Hitler “fought against the Jews because they were dealing with usury and money” and denied

that “Hitler killed the Jews for being Jews”. Officials or official social media posts from Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions glorified perpetrators of attacks against Israeli civilians.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates calls by the Middle East Quartet for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. Notwithstanding some positive steps, negative trends continued.

During this period, Israeli authorities reduced the handling fee for fuel that Israel transfers to the PA on a monthly basis to increase revenues in the PA. On 9 July, Israel’s Security Cabinet voted to act to “prevent the collapse of the Palestinian Authority”.

On 30 July, President Mahmoud Abbas presided over a meeting of Secretaries-General of Palestinian factions in Egypt, calling for a follow-up committee to complete dialogue to end divisions and achieve Palestinian national unity. On 10 August, President Abbas issued a presidential decree removing 12 of the 16 PA governors from office, including four from Gaza.

On 14 August, participants at a Hamas-organized meeting called for elections to take place in Gaza under Central Elections Commission supervision — a call welcomed by Hamas.

On 17 September, the Erez crossing was closed for exits due to Jewish holidays, and it has remained closed due to the violence near the security fence, with some exceptions including the transfer of patients for medical treatment. Over 22,000 work and business permit holders have been denied exit since the closure.

Meanwhile, funding shortages continue to undermine the United Nations ability to provide crucial services to Palestinians. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) urgently still needs \$75 million to maintain food assistance through the end of the year to 1.2 million Palestinians in Gaza, while the World Food Programme requires \$32 million to restore social assistance to priority families across the occupied Palestinian territory. In addition, at the moment, the humanitarian appeal for Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory is funded at only 33 per cent.

In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council also calls upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel

and the territories occupied since 1967. On 26 June, the United States Department of State confirmed that it had circulated foreign policy guidance to relevant agencies advising that

“engaging in bilateral scientific and technological cooperation with Israel in geographic areas which came under the administration of Israel after June 5, 1967, and which remain subject to final-status negotiations, is inconsistent with U.S. foreign policy.”

Resolution 2334 (2016) also calls upon all parties to continue, inter alia, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations. On 12 August, Saudi Arabia appointed an Ambassador to the State of Palestine and a Consul General in Jerusalem for the first time since 1947. On 14 August, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, Jordan's King Abdullah II and Palestinian President Abbas met in Egypt. Their joint statement noted the importance of Israel halting all settlement activity, the confiscation of Palestinian land and the eviction of Palestinians from their homes, while underscoring that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause is the key to stability in the region. On 18 September, Saudi Arabia, the League of Arab States and the European Union, in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, convened a ministerial meeting to discuss practical ways to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process.

In conclusion, allow me to share the Secretary-General's observations on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

“I remain deeply troubled by the unrelenting expansion of Israeli settlements and settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with over 10,000 housing units advanced in this reporting period alone. Settlements further entrench the occupation, fuel violence, impede Palestinian access to their land and resources and systematically erode the viability of a Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution. I reiterate that settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. I call on the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity and dismantle outposts immediately, in line with its obligations under international law;

“The demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, entail numerous human

rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer. I call upon the Government of Israel to end that practice, in line with its international obligations, and to allow Palestinian communities to build and address their development needs;

“I remain gravely concerned by the intensification of violence in the occupied West Bank and Israel — at a level not seen in decades — and the use of increasingly lethal weaponry, including in densely populated areas. Immediate steps are needed to de-escalate tensions;

“I condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror. Such acts can never be justified and must be condemned by all. Perpetrators must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. I am disturbed by the high levels of settler-related violence, often in the proximity of Israeli security forces, with perpetrators rarely held accountable. Israel must act to stop all settler violence. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to abide by its obligations under international law to protect the Palestinian population against all acts or threats of violence;

“I am appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. Children must never be the target of violence, used or put in harm's way;

“Security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. I call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law, including with regard to the proportional use of force, and ensure thorough, independent and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force, while holding those responsible to account;

“In Gaza, the resurgence of violence near the perimeter fence is a reminder of the fragility of the situation and the risk of escalation. Despite some easing of access restrictions, more needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation and improve the economy and the freedom of movement. However, only sustainable political solutions, with the ultimate goal of lifting the debilitating Israeli closures in line with resolution 1860 (2009), will restore hope to Gaza's long-suffering population;

“I am disturbed by the multiple instances in which officials have used dangerous or racist rhetoric and engaged in incitement, which must

be rejected by all. I welcome President Abbas' convening of Palestinian factions in Egypt and encourage all actors to take concrete steps towards reuniting Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, democratic Government;

"The absence of intra-Palestinian unity continues to undermine Palestinian national aspirations. I remain concerned about the critical state of the Palestinian Authority's finances, which is affecting the Government's ability to deliver services and pay public-sector salaries. I note the Israeli Security Cabinet's decision to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and encourage Israel and relevant stakeholders to take tangible steps in that regard, while also encouraging the PA to undertake reforms;

"I also urge Member States to enable UNRWA to deliver on its General Assembly mandate to ensure the delivery of essential services that are crucial to stability throughout the region. I also encourage additional support to the World Food Programme so that it can continue delivering vital assistance to the most vulnerable Palestinian families. I welcome the additional pledges made to UNRWA during the ministerial meeting on 21 September;

"There can be no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements, in pursuit of the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States."

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

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

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The United States continues to believe that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve equal measures of security, prosperity and freedom. We are committed

to a two-State solution and will continue to pursue steps aimed at promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. But the ongoing violence is setting back the prospects for peace and is responsible for enormous and needless suffering.

The United States is deeply concerned about the levels of violence in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, including the violence in Gaza that resulted in the temporary closure of the Erez crossing. We express our condolences for the civilians who have been injured or killed in the past month across Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. The United States welcomes all efforts to de-escalate the ongoing violence. We call on all parties to refrain from actions and rhetoric that further inflame the tensions there, including hateful rhetoric, settlement activity, evictions, the demolition of Palestinian homes, terrorism, incitement to violence and payments to the families of terrorists. On the topic of hateful rhetoric, I want to reiterate that the United States condemns President Abbas's blatantly antisemitic remarks in August, which wrongly maligned the Jewish people and distorted the Holocaust. Such divisive and hateful remarks only undermine the prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The sharp rise in violence by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinians is also deeply alarming. All perpetrators of violence against civilians, whether Israeli or Palestinian, should be held accountable according to the law. We should make no mistake, the expansion of settlements undermines the geographic viability of a two-State solution, exacerbates tensions and further harms trust between the two parties. The United States strongly opposes the advancement of settlements and urges Israel to refrain from that activity. We take the issue very seriously, as it undermines the possibility of a future contiguous Palestinian State, and we have been raising the problem it presents at the highest levels on a consistent basis. I also want to reiterate that the United States firmly supports the preservation of the historic status quo with respect to the holy sites in Jerusalem, and we oppose actions that depart from that status quo or otherwise disturb the sanctity of the sites. Such action is unacceptable.

We continue to engage with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to promote steps to lower tensions and restore goodwill. To that end, we welcome the ongoing consultations by Israel, the Palestinians and regional partners aimed at convening a meeting soon in the important Aqaba-Sharm El-Sheikh format.

As we work for long-term stability, we must also continue to support the immediate needs of Palestinian refugees. Last week I was pleased to be able to announce nearly \$73 million in additional contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Even with that pledge and others made at last week's ministerial meeting, we remain deeply concerned about the possibility that UNRWA will not be able to operate through the end of the year. We call on all donors to provide additional assistance as soon as possible.

As we speak, various actors, including Iran and Hizbullah, are working to undermine peace and stability in the region. When the Security Council overwhelmingly supported the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), we reaffirmed our commitment to ensuring that those forces do not prevail. As a steadfast partner of Lebanon, and as we emphasized in our explanation of our vote on 31 August (see S/PV.9409), the United States calls on the Government to take additional steps to ensure the full implementation of UNIFIL's mandate, consistent with the terms of the status-of-forces agreement. That includes additional steps to mitigate any restrictions on UNIFIL's freedom of movement. And as we have previously noted, we also imposed sanctions on Green without Borders for its support to Hizbullah on 16 August. Furthermore, the United States vote to renew UNIFIL's mandate has not changed any other aspect of United States policy, including as it pertains to the status of the Golan Heights. Our policy in that regard remains unchanged from 2019.

In conclusion, I want to express the continued support of the United States for efforts to normalize relations between Israel, its neighbours and other countries in the region. We are hopeful that the next iteration of the Negev format will soon be convened at the ministerial level and will further advance regional integration initiatives. There is no shortage of challenges facing the region, which makes the Council's engagement all the more important and urgent. Let us work together to advance peace, dialogue and a brighter future for all.

**Mr. De Rivière (France)** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

Thirty years after the Oslo Accords, the pace of Israeli construction is increasing in the occupied Palestinian territories. France condemns that policy,

which contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention and a number of Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territories or the legalization of illegal settlements and calls on Israel to put an end to those practices.

The policy constitutes an obstacle to a settlement of the conflict and to achieving a two-State solution. The Council should therefore ensure respect for its own resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016). The priority should be ensuring that unilateral measures cease. We need to see an end to settlement activity, whether through the expansion or establishment of new settlements, the forced eviction of Palestinian families or the destruction of Palestinian structures and economic and humanitarian infrastructure in Area C in East Jerusalem, including schools. France recalls that resolution 2334 (2016) also calls on States to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In line with its obligations, the European Union is monitoring its strict implementation.

Faced with the ongoing deterioration of the situation, we must urgently restore a political horizon. Inaction brings with it a trail of violence and victims. France reaffirms its condemnation of acts of terrorism and its unwavering commitment to Israel's security and the protection of civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories. The peace process must be restarted as a matter of urgency. The parameters are well known — two States, living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both. France encourages the United Nations to work towards the resumption of peace negotiations as soon as possible.

In that regard, France expresses its full support for the initiative led by the European Union, Saudi Arabia and the League of Arab States to prepare a package of measures that will benefit both Palestinians and Israelis, once a peace agreement has been signed. That initiative must enable us to set up the incentives needed for the resumption of negotiations. At its inaugural ministerial-level meeting, held on 18 September on the margins of the General Assembly's seventy-eighth session, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Catherine Colonna, made clear that France is ready to contribute to that end.

**Mrs. Frazier (Malta)**: I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for presenting the twenty-seventh report

of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and briefing us on recent developments.

Unfortunately, the lack of progress is deeply worrisome. Negative trends, which erode any prospects for a two-State solution, remain commonplace. We are faced with a situation that is increasingly unsustainable for Palestinians and Israelis alike. As we are confronted by that negative trajectory, I would like to stress three crucial points.

First, Malta reiterates that settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are in violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. We are therefore concerned about the recently announced plans to advance yet another new settlement. We also remain concerned about demolitions and the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities and their impact on the viability of a two-State solution.

Secondly, we need to bring to a complete stop the persistent cycle of acts of violence against civilians, including the incitement to violence and inflammatory rhetoric. Malta is disturbed by the number of terror attacks on Israeli civilians that have been perpetrated to date this year, and we unequivocally condemn those unjustifiable acts. Episodes of settler violence, which have terrorized Palestinian communities, are equally condemnable. We call for the perpetrators to be swiftly brought to justice. The repercussions that the conflict is having on civilians have seen a distressing upsurge this year, with nearly daily violence and children being victimized on both sides. As we continue to witness violent acts, we must stress that obligations under international humanitarian law need to be respected in the paramount interest of protecting civilians. Political leaders should also refrain from further incitement and provocations that inflame tensions, produce hate and glorify violence. Such inflammatory rhetoric only pushes us further away from meaningful dialogue.

Thirdly, credible negotiations on all final-status issues must be the basis of all our efforts. Malta is encouraged by the Peace Day Effort initiative, which was launched here in New York last week. We look forward to working on its potential to build on initiatives towards achieving a comprehensive regional peace.

Addressing the fiscal and political situation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is also key. We urge the Palestinian factions to continue engagement towards a

good-faith reconciliation process, and the PA to hold its postponed national elections without further delay. Critically, we must strive to address the increasingly dire humanitarian needs of the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, where 1.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. On that front, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains the brightest beacon of hope for many Palestinians and requires our increased support in the face of continued funding shortages.

In conclusion, Malta reiterates its unwavering support for a just and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict, based on a two-State solution, along the pre-1967 borders, while addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of the two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. A recommitment to the peace process by all parties is imperative if we are to restore stability and secure a lasting peace.

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

The question of Palestine lies at the heart of the Middle East problem. At the recently concluded general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, the repeated references that were made to the issue reflect the international community's general interest in, and deep concern about, the current Palestinian-Israeli situation. The high-level week of the General Assembly also featured a number of meetings and discussions on the Middle East. An overview of the statements made at the events conclusively demonstrates that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, a peaceful coexistence between the two States of Palestine and Israel and the shared development of the Arab and Israeli peoples are the common aspirations of all countries and peoples advocating for peace and justice. With regard to the most recent developments, I would like to make three points.

First, we should redouble our efforts to promote peace and advance the two-State solution. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords. Regrettably, 30 years later the occupied Palestinian territories remain entrenched in conflict and turmoil. And the two-State solution remains mere words whose foundation has been increasingly eroded,

with the window of opportunity for achieving peace closing at a seemingly faster pace. Currently, only firm political will, effective diplomatic action and decisive collective efforts can put the Middle East peace process back on track. China calls for a higher priority to be given to the question of Palestine on the international agenda and for more meaningful action to be taken to realize the two-State solution on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and other international consensual measures. At the general debate last week, President Abbas reiterated once again his call on the United Nations to convene an international peace conference, and China echoes his call to that end. I would like to reiterate China's support for convening a larger and more authoritative and influential international peace conference in order to create the conditions necessary for resuming peace talks. We hope that the Council will fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and earnestly uphold the principles of fairness and justice. We also support the Council in sending a mission to visit Palestine and Israel as soon as possible.

Secondly, the international rule of law must be upheld and settlement activities must cease. The continued expansion of settlements encroaches on Palestinian land, usurps Palestinian resources and contracts the living space of the Palestinian people, all of which actions are in violation of international law and the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). We once again urge the cessation of all settlement activities, unilateral actions aimed at changing the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territories and escalations of settler violence. And we call on the parties concerned to return to the right track of the two-State solution. Religious and holy sites are places in which believers are deeply invested emotionally, and as such efforts should be made to effectively preserve their historical status quo in Jerusalem and to respect the Jordan's custodianship over them.

Thirdly, it is important to ensure economic development and people's livelihood and to break the cycle of violence. The 50-year-long occupation has severely hindered Palestinian economic and social development, and the recurrent violence and conflicts continue to exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people. China condemns all violence against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, opposes all acts of provocation and incitement and calls on Palestine and Israel to break the cycle of violence

and achieve common security through dialogue and cooperation. We urge the occupying Power to fulfil its obligations under international law, to relax and remove unreasonable restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and land use and to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip as soon as possible. The international community should continue to increase development and humanitarian assistance to Palestine and to support Palestine in meeting its economic and livelihood needs. As we speak, a 100-strong Palestinian delegation is competing in 16 events of the Asian Games being held in Hangzhou, China. The Asian Games represent the lofty aspiration of our peoples for peace, tolerance and unity. We sincerely wish the Palestinian athletes great success in showcasing their sportsmanship and in kindling hope.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate China's firm support for the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and for Palestine to become a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. We are ready to work with the international community to continue to make unremitting efforts to promote an early, comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his helpful briefing.

I have three areas I wish to highlight since our previous meeting in August (see S/PV.9400).

First, 15 September marked the third anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords. The United Kingdom celebrates the success of the Accords, and we are unabashed in encouraging more countries to normalize their relations with Israel and to seize the opportunities it presents. We are also committed to making sure that normalization delivers concrete benefits for the Palestinian people.

Secondly, from 11 to 13 September, the British Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Foreign Secretary spoke with Israeli and Palestinian leaders and called for a de-escalation of tensions, emphasized the importance of holding long-overdue elections in the occupied Palestinian territories and made crystal-clear the commitment of the United Kingdom to a two-State solution as the only way to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. The

thirtieth anniversary of the Oslo Accords is a poignant reminder that we must work together to achieve lasting and sustainable peace in the region. During his visit, the Foreign Secretary met the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and went to the Jalazone refugee camp to see, first hand, the impact of the Agency's work to protect the most vulnerable.

That brings me to my third point. We have previously discussed the ongoing funding crisis that UNRWA faces. The United Kingdom was proud to announce an additional £10 million during the visit to help address the crisis. Other States pledged more funds to UNRWA during high-level week. We must now make sure those funds are available quickly, and we must maintain efforts to put the Agency on a more sustainable financial footing.

Separately, I want to highlight a report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published last week showing that 1,105 Palestinians have been displaced from their communities since 2022. A major and increasing concern is that the increasing settler violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, largely unchallenged, renders Palestinians at risk of forcible transfer. We call on the Israeli Government to tackle that threat. Tragically, the year 2023 has already seen at least 193 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank, and 31 Israelis have died at the hands of terrorists. We must end the cycle of violence.

**Ms. Bongo** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing.

The fragility of the security and humanitarian situation on the ground requires greater commitment from the international community with respect to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for more than 70 years. Countries in the subregion and those with influence on both parties must step up their participation. Dialogue and direct negotiations between the parties must be resumed. The political solution is the most viable outcome, and one that is capable of leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. That lasting peace cannot be envisaged in a context of hateful rhetoric, settlement expansion, demolitions, expulsions — particularly in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem — and acts of provocation at the holy sites, such as those that occurred again last Sunday at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. My

country calls for an end to violations of international law and respect for the status quo of the holy sites. We reiterate our commitment to the crucial role played by the Kingdom of Jordan as the official Custodian of the Muslim Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

The growing budgetary constraints experienced by the Palestinian territories have serious consequences on the population's access to care, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where patients struggle to obtain exit authorizations for medical purposes within a reasonable time frame. The Palestinian economy is suffering from restrictions placed on travel and trade in the occupied West Bank and from the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Gabon calls for the lifting of that blockade, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

On the humanitarian front, we welcome the holding, on the margins of the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, of the high-level meeting on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides essential education, health-care and protection services, among other things, to nearly 6 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Without financial support, the Agency will no longer be able to provide its services in the coming months. That situation would only dramatically increase social tensions on the ground, notably poverty and violence — particularly gender-based violence, including in refugee camps. In that regard, the announcement by the United States to grant additional funding to UNRWA to the tune of \$73 million is a positive step.

Regarding regional dynamics, we have taken careful note of the process of normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. We hope that momentum will promote greater stabilization in the region and can benefit the Middle East peace process, including the Palestinian question. In that regard, the arrival of a Saudi delegation yesterday on an official visit to Jericho, in the occupied West Bank, the first since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, is a sign of encouragement.

In conclusion, Gabon reiterates its commitment to the two-State solution. We call on the parties to respect Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016), and to implement the commitments made in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh.

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): I wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his insightful briefing on the situation in the Middle East. Mozambique commends his efforts towards peace and stability in the region.

The current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is tense, violent and deplorable. It is marked by clashes, killings and displacements, involving Israeli forces and Palestinian civilians and armed groups. It is a situation that leaves little room for a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

We are profoundly disturbed by the repeated and gross violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We strongly condemn those violations. We call on the parties to follow the path of a constructive and productive dialogue aimed at securing a lasting peace and justice for both Palestine and Israel. We condemn the practice of hate and making inflammatory statements, be they official or individual. They should be vigorously discouraged, as they serve only the purpose of exacerbating and deepening differences between the parties and perpetuating the culture of conflict and hatred.

We call on the Government of Israel to refrain from acting on its recent promises to intensify punitive actions against the Palestinian people. We further call on Israel to abide by international law and refrain from engaging in illegal activity in the occupied territories, including the West Bank.

Mozambique holds the view that the worrisome events that have been taking place recently in Palestine and those described in today's briefing remind us of the urgent need for action by the international community as a whole. The Security Council in particular is duty-bound to fulfil its responsibility, entrusted to it by the Charter of the United Nations, which is to maintain peace and security wherever they are endangered. In that connection, we call on the parties to immediately stop the bloodshed, halt mutual provocations and attacks and put an end to the human suffering in the occupied territories. We urge the parties to take confidence- and trust-building measures so as to allow the dialogue to flow — a dialogue aimed at launching the necessary foundations for a long-lasting solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live peacefully together side by side.

On the humanitarian front, we reiterate our call for the international community to provide financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme.

Mozambique firmly believes that Palestine and Israel can peacefully settle their differences and enjoy a peaceful coexistence as good neighbours, based on the purposes and principles of the Charter. Lessons from peace processes around the world and in our Southern African region in particular demonstrate that peace is always possible if the conflicting parties are genuinely willing to follow the path of justice, fairness and tolerance. In that vein, we wish to encourage the ongoing dialogue initiatives and others that may arise in order to ensure that this crisis, which has lasted more 70 years, is finally brought to an end.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on Israel's settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories in the context of the twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We listened carefully to the Special Coordinator's assessment of the continuing tensions in the West Bank against the backdrop of Israel's increasing unilateral steps to create irreversible facts on the ground. It is once again clear that the continuing explosive situation is a direct consequence of Israel's aggressive illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including violent raids, arbitrary arrests, settler extremism and unprecedented settlement expansion, coupled with forced evictions of Palestinian families, the confiscation of their property, the legalization of settlement outposts and violations of the status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem.

Since the beginning of this year, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has recorded some 600 settler attacks on Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, which have occurred against the backdrop of the Israeli leadership's plans to increase the number of Israelis living in the northern West Bank from the current 170,000 to 1 million by 2050, with an estimated \$200 million allocated for that illegal activity. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities decided to simplify the administrative procedures required to approve the construction of more than 4,500 housing

units in the West Bank, in violation of the provisions of the relevant decisions of the Council and international law. In parallel, the Government of Israel has approved and funded a plan to preserve Israeli archaeological sites in Area C in order to “strengthen the Jewish roots in Judea and Samaria”.

Meanwhile, Israeli radicals are making provocative visits to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on a near-daily basis, and more than 1,200 Palestinians are in administrative detention in Israeli prisons. Of particular concern is the increase in violence against minors — more than 40 Palestinian children have been killed since the beginning of the year — and the demolition of educational institutions, including some that were built with donor funds.

The continuing deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone, with a vacuum in the negotiations track and the absence of any prospects for a Middle East peace process, is undoubtedly a cause for concern for us. In the context of the de facto dismantling of the universally recognized international legal basis for a peace settlement, the United States continues to promote Arab-Israeli normalization, circumventing the logic of the Arab Peace Initiative, put forward by Saudi Arabia in 2002, which envisages a resolution of the Palestinian issue first, and then, only after that is achieved, the restoration of relations with Israel. Washington’s actions nullify the prospects for reviving direct negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on all final-status issues on the basis of the universally recognized framework for the Middle East peace process, the central element of which is the two-State solution, which we have consistently supported.

In the current circumstances, it is important to continue efforts to maintain the necessary international attention to the developments on the ground in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone and to not allow the international legal basis for a peaceful settlement to be undermined. Russia is committed to the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Our position is consistent and will not change owing to any opportunistic calculations. In that context, we support all the relevant practical initiatives, in particular, that of organizing a visit of Secretary-General Guterres to the region, as well as the steps taken by the Palestinians themselves to defend their inalienable rights to their own State and to become a full member of the United Nations.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his comprehensive briefing.

The recent events in the occupied Palestinian territory have reminded us of how urgent it is that we intensify diplomatic efforts at the regional and international levels in order to reduce escalation and build confidence. We emphasize the importance of exercising restraint and pursuing dialogue. Direct negotiations are the only way to guarantee security and stability for both sides. In that context, we welcome the diplomatic momentum that we witnessed last week on the margins of the general debate of the General Assembly to explore ways to coordinate international efforts in order to revive the peace process. That includes the meeting organized by Saudi Arabia, the League of Arab States and the European Union in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, which presented positive proposals for supporting peace and maintaining the possibility of a two-State solution. Looking ahead, we hope that the international community will take concrete steps towards a resumption of serious and meaningful negotiations between the two parties, based on the agreed international terms of reference, including the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

It will also be crucial to end all illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially the repeated attacks on Palestinian cities and villages and the persistent storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque by extremists, the most recent of which occurred this week. We stress in that regard the need to preserve the legal and historical status of the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites, provide full protection to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and respect the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan’s custodianship of the holy sites and endowments. Another critical issue is ending and rejecting extremism and all types of hate speech, which are becoming increasingly common and are heightening current tensions. As the Security Council affirmed in resolution 2686 (2023), this type of rhetoric leads to the proliferation, repetition and exacerbation of conflicts.

In the context of today’s discussion, we want to express our concern about Israel’s continued settlement activities, which are in violation of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and also undermine peace efforts.

Furthermore, we emphasize the need to prevent and halt settler violence, which has reached unprecedented levels and threatens to spark further tensions.

Regarding the dire humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, we note that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that 2 million people there are in need of humanitarian aid. It is vital that the international community continue to provide the necessary aid to our brother Palestinian people, including funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which plays a crucial role in supporting Palestinian refugees and establishing stability in the region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates affirms its commitment to a two-State solution whereby an independent Palestinian State can be established within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition. We reiterate our support for all regional and international efforts to achieve that goal, and call on all the parties concerned to work to establish peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. Nyarku** (Ghana): We are grateful to Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing to the Council on the overall situation in the Middle East, with an emphasis on the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016).

Ghana has been following the recent positive developments in the Middle East with keen interest. During the general debate of the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session we welcomed the commitment made by the leaders of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to working closely with neighbouring countries, the United Nations and the international community in order to prevent further violence, resolve their differences and embrace a path of genuine peace with a view to putting a definitive end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We have noted Israel's efforts to improve its relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Sudan and Morocco under the framework of the Abraham Accords, as well as the prospect of a historic peace deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia. We encourage the deepening of Arab-Jewish relations to forge a broader reconciliation between Judaism and Islam, two of the major faiths in the Middle East.

The positive developments notwithstanding, we remain deeply troubled by the increasing violence, including acts of terror, provocation, incitement and

destruction. Among them are attacks in the occupied West Bank and Israel, settler-related activities in the Gaza Strip and the persistent expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We believe that the destruction of infrastructure and property in both the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem, along with the continued settlement activities, is reshaping the demographics on the ground, seriously imperilling the viability of a two-State solution and contributing to a downward spiral. In that regard, we would like to briefly highlight three points.

First, we urge for a relaunch of serious political talks, supported by the international community, to address key territorial and security issues, including those related to settlements and settler violence.

Secondly, the Council should support the restoration of mechanisms that facilitate more regular and sustained contact between both sides in order to address key issues, including the economic, social and security concerns of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and security coordination between Israel and Palestine aimed at reducing terrorist capabilities.

Last but not least, the international community should support the crafting of a coordinated package of short-term investments to help the Palestinian Authority restore access to basic education, health and social services, create employment opportunities for young people and women, repair basic infrastructure and strengthen the Authority's fiscal stability.

We urge Israel to end its demolition of Palestinian-owned properties, prevent the displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, refrain from establishing new settlements in the West Bank and halt the authorization of new outposts in the occupied Palestinian territories. We reiterate our position that a path to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East can be achieved only through an internationally negotiated two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side based on the 1967 borders.

Finally, we reaffirm our demand that all parties comply fully with their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international human rights law — including that obliging them to protect civilian populations — as well as the many relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016). We further call on

both parties to show maximum restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that may contribute to violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Israel.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, but it is regrettable that numerous incidents have exacerbated tensions between Israel and Palestine since the beginning of the year. The lack of political progress is jeopardizing peace and security in the region. We strongly call on all the parties concerned to take concrete steps to ensure de-escalation. In particular, both Israel and Palestine need to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any inflammatory words or actions.

At the same time, we again condemn the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including the authorization by the Israeli Government of three settler outposts earlier this month. Japan continues to demand that Israel immediately stop settlement activities, including demolitions and evictions. They are a clear violation of international law and go against the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In addition, we are concerned that the Palestinian Authority's governing capabilities are decreasing in various respects. While taking note of the Israeli Cabinet's decision in July to prevent the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, Japan calls on both parties to advance practical cooperation. Japan looks forward to seeing tangible results to strengthen the financial capabilities of the Palestinian Authority as soon as possible.

For our part, Japan has supported Palestine in realizing its self-reliant economy. Recently, Japan began joint efforts with partners in the region, such as Egypt and Jordan, on assistance to Palestine and held Japan-Egypt-Jordan trilateral ministerial consultations on the Middle East for the first time this month.

Supporting Palestine refugees is very important for achieving stability in the region. In fact, Japan became a donor country to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) even before joining the United Nations. Our assistance to UNRWA has surpassed \$1 billion over the past 70 years. This year, Japan has contributed more than \$40 million to UNRWA, including \$1 million in emergency assistance to the Jenin refugee camp. We

urge our fellow Member States to provide the necessary support to make sure that the Agency sustains its core services for Palestinian refugees.

Japan once again reiterates that a long-term resolution of the conflict is possible only with a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We are always ready to support any diplomatic efforts to achieve that goal.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing this morning. I reiterate Ecuador's support for his efforts to prevent the further deterioration of a delicate and volatile situation.

The reports are worrisome and the statistics far from encouraging. This has already been the most violent year since 2005, and the number of victims continues to rise, while the number of settlements increases and violence is a daily occurrence. It is imperative to reverse those trends.

Last week, just a few metres from this Chamber, the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of Palestine addressed the General Assembly. Both leaders spoke of peace, ending the conflict and achieving a final settlement. Beyond the differences that may exist in the details of alternative solutions or paths to be followed to reach it, we appreciate the fact that, in spite of everything, the common objective has not been lost sight of for peaceful coexistence between two neighbouring peoples who deserve a future without violence. We also call for those words to lead to action — the commitment to peace and ending the conflict should not just be expressed once a year in September in New York, but it should be built into the daily rhetoric and, above all, into the decisions and actions that are taken in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

We hope that concrete steps will be taken to reduce tensions, build confidence and recover a political horizon that will lead to effective negotiations. I reiterate Ecuador's commitment, as a Council member, to support any measure or initiative that encourages the parties to resume negotiations and avoid further violence. It is our duty to seek paths towards peace in this and in all conflicts. Ecuador, like all the members of the Council present here, has repeatedly expressed its commitment to a negotiated, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the co-existence of two States — Palestine and Israel — on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

Much work remains to be done to achieve that yearned-for final settlement. Until then, as we strive to achieve it, we must also ensure that the peoples of Israel and Palestine enjoy decent living conditions, that their integrity and security are protected and that human rights and the rules of international law and international humanitarian law are respected. That is why I wish to address the situation of the children caught up in the middle of the conflict and the existence of grave violations of their rights. We call on the parties to implement measures to put an end to the killing, recruitment and arbitrary detention of children, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In the same vein, I would like to conclude by recalling that addressing the needs of displaced populations is the responsibility of the international community, regardless of the causes or perpetrators of the conflict. I call on all those who are able to contribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme to do so without delay.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

As other colleagues have already mentioned, this year marks the commemoration of the Oslo Accords. However, the path to a peace based on a two-State solution promised in Oslo faces ever more imposing obstacles.

The first of those obstacles is the troubling increase in settlements. Switzerland recalls that settlements are illegal under international humanitarian law and run counter to several resolutions of the Security Council. Therefore, in resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council reiterates

“its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem” (resolution 2334 (2016), *para. 2*).

The same resolution also reaffirms that the establishment of settlements constitutes a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. In addition, we condemn the coercive environment leading to the forced displacement of Palestinian communities.

The lack of protection for Palestinians from settler attacks, threats and intimidation — which have increased significantly this year, according to the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — is particularly alarming. Israel, as the occupying Power, must refrain from taking any measures that would introduce permanent changes to the Palestinian territory.

It is alarming to note that the security situation continues to deteriorate throughout the occupied territory. In Gaza, the risk of implosion is once again high, while neither side seems prepared to embark upon genuine de-escalation. The violent clashes along the separation barrier and the air strikes are evidence of that. Switzerland calls for the lifting of the blockade that has been imposed on the Gaza Strip for almost 16 years, especially in the light of the concerning deterioration of the humanitarian situation. In addition, the immediate reopening of the Erez crossing point is necessary to enable some 20,000 Gazans to work in Israel.

At the same time, the increasing tensions in the West Bank, in particular following the Israeli operations in Jenin, Jericho and Nablus, or linked to the proliferation of small armed groups, are also concerning. Switzerland reiterates its call on all parties to respect their obligations under international law and to protect civilians. It recalls the obligations of the Israeli authorities with regard to the use of force.

As Sukkot approaches, we urge the relevant authorities to minimize the risk of tensions around the holy sites, to respect the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Jordan's custodianship role. We call on the leaders of all parties to refrain from any unilateral measures, provocative acts or inflammatory language, which heighten tensions, as demonstrated once again in recent weeks.

Switzerland welcomes last week's ministerial meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and the Peace Day Effort initiative in New York.

We note that there is a consensus on the need to relaunch the peace process. Switzerland remains convinced that only a two-State solution, negotiated by both parties, in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters, including Security Council resolutions, can lead to lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. That is the objective agreed 30 years ago in Oslo. To that end, Switzerland remains ready to support any initiative, including through its good offices.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

In his address to the General Assembly last week, President Lula da Silva highlighted the overdue establishment of a Palestinian State as an example of long-standing unresolved disputes lingering on while new threats to international peace and security emerge.

Brazil has recognized the State of Palestine since 2010. However, we are fully aware of the serious obstacles that the Palestinian people face to enjoy their legitimate rights. The international community in general and the Security Council in particular have become unresponsive to the plight of the Palestinians. That must change.

Brazil reiterates its unwavering support to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and enduring peace in the Middle East and to the two-State solution, so that Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace and security within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders. Our collective support is needed even more now that a two-State solution is gravely endangered by violence and acts that represent a flagrant violation of international law in general and of decisions of long-standing by the Security Council.

Revitalizing the political process is the cornerstone to containing the current cycle of violence. The data from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is alarming. This year has seen the highest number of casualties in the occupied Palestinian territories of both Palestinians and Israelis since 2005. Managing the conflict is not an acceptable alternative to effective negotiations.

The Council should also seriously reflect on its role in paving the way for new direct negotiations. Sitting on our hands while the situation unravels is short-sighted and dangerous. It is not what we are here for. Meanwhile, we must address the core issues driving current tensions. The main one is the expansion of the Israeli settlements. Resolution 2334 (2016) states clearly that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, are unlawful and must be immediately halted. Brazil continues to call upon the Israeli Government to cease policies promoting those illegal practices and to curb settler violence.

Brazil strongly condemns yet again all violence against civilians, be they Palestinians or Israelis. We firmly oppose terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We call on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and actively avoid further escalation. The recent distressing events at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque are deeply disturbing. We condemn any action that aims to alter the historical status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites. We recognize and appreciate the pivotal role the Kingdom of Jordan has played as a custodian over the years.

Peace is intertwined with the universal promotion and respect for human rights. We emphasize the urgency of improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. That involves fostering the growth of the Palestinian economy, addressing governance challenges and respecting their fundamental rights. Brazil intends to enhance its contribution to projects in that area. The situation in Gaza, with its continued blockade, remains a significant impediment to development endeavours with all its social implications.

Lastly, Brazil remains deeply concerned about the persistent financial limitations faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees offered by the Agency remains indispensable. We call on all States to redouble efforts to further support it.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Albania.

I thank the Special Coordinator Wennesland for his thorough update.

We just left behind an unusual busy high-level week in which a special focus was placed on renewed efforts for conflict resolution worldwide, including the Israeli-Palestinian question. We noticed, without surprise, strong support from world leaders for a two-State solution. The phrase "two States for two peoples", highlighted so many times, translates the great need and the urgency for the prospects for peace to be restored as soon as possible.

In that respect, we feel encouraged by the regional and interregional peace efforts. We commend the ministerial meeting on the Peace Day Effort, of 18 September, hosted by the European Union, Saudi Arabia and the League of Arab States in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan and the efforts to produce a

peace supporting package. Parties must see such efforts as a genuine contribution to revive the peace process, and they must do their part, refrain from unilateral steps and focus on de-escalation and steps that could ease the already high tensions of the situation.

In the past two years, an unacceptable high death toll for civilians on both sides has been recorded. That cannot and must not become the new normal.

We condemn in the strongest terms all terrorist attacks and stand with Israel in its right to self-defence from such acts through a proportionate response.

Terrorism cannot serve any cause; it cannot be condoned; it should never be glorified; and terrorists cannot be compensated. Terrorism must only be condemned and by all.

However, we are also deeply worried by the extremist settler violence against Palestinian civilians, by the demolitions and evictions, including the destruction of homes and donor-funded objects, including schools. We call for all those cases to be fully investigated and for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

International humanitarian law must be fully observed. Laws and rules that we have established to protect civilians and their implementation are not optional; they are mandatory. In that respect, we call for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and reiterate our position that settlements and their expansion are illegal under international law and an impediment to the peace process.

We will continue to stand firmly against hate speech, inflammatory rhetoric and incitement to violence. No one should be allowed to use historical distortion, including the denial of the Holocaust, for political gains. Such rhetoric, which exacerbates tensions on the ground, is an insult to the millions of victims of the Holocaust and to the lessons learned from the dark hours of history. Communication at any level, but particularly at high levels by political leaders, cannot become a competition of hate. Such behaviour will lead nowhere except to more division, more violence and confrontation.

What is needed is diplomacy, negotiation, cooperation, mutual understanding and trust to pave the way for a future where peace and prosperity do not remain a dream but become a reality and for all.

As a strong supporter of the freedom of religion and belief, Albania supports the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. We praise the special role of the Jordan custodianship and call on all parties to refrain from all provocation and other actions in that respect.

We profoundly believe that achieving a just and lasting solution requires continued and dedicated efforts and unwavering commitment from all sides — Israel and Palestine, but also neighbouring States and the international community. Therefore, we call on the parties to abide by their commitments in Aqaba, Jordan, and Sharm El-Sheikh and seek opportunities for cooperation on all regional platforms, including the Negev Forum.

We know it only too well — peace never comes from outside, but help and support do. Peace never falls from the sky. It is the fruit of genuine, continued, relentless efforts, even when the horizon is blurred, as it is now. Oslo must not remain a moment in history, but rather it must be the convincing proof that dialogue and compromise are possible, that peace is possible and that another future is possible.

It is therefore first up to both sides to engage in genuine efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to establishing a robust process that will lead to the creation of a viable and democratic Palestine and a secure Israel, with secure borders for both countries sharing Jerusalem as their capital, living side by side as two States for two peoples, fully entitled to equal safety, security and prosperity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

*The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.*