



Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

Provisional

9588th meeting
Tuesday, 26 March 2024, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Yamazaki	(Japan)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
	France	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault/Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Ms. Persaud
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Yesterday the delegation of France, when discussing the Security Council meeting that we had requested to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, set a procedural precedent when it insisted that the Council take all decisions regarding the holding of meetings only in the Chamber. Upon the initiative of France, there was a procedural vote on the agenda item, despite the fact that the Japanese presidency had announced the meeting and that it was included on the provisional programme of work of the Council. However, in the Chamber, the presidency was not able to confirm its ruling.

In addition, yesterday France and generally the Western “troika” of permanent members of the Council essentially refused to permit a Council member to call a meeting that, as I said, had already been announced and that, I note, was not on a subject outside the purview of the Council but under the agenda item “Threats to international peace and security” (see S/PV.9587). It was not the agenda item that they did not like, upon which the Japanese presidency ultimately forced us to vote, but the subject of the meeting itself. For some reason we voted on the agenda item.

We will return to that issue in greater detail. For the time being, given the precedent set by France, and in order to avoid misunderstandings, we are of the view that the decision to hold meetings must be taken directly at the beginning of each of those meetings. The logical question would be whether members of the Security Council support the convening of the meeting or if any of them do not support it. We, of course, would prefer the presidency word the question for a procedural vote in that way. It is important to ensure that nobody, like France yesterday, is opposed. After yesterday’s negative precedent however, in which the presidency refused to word the question in that way, right now we cannot expect that. Therefore, we ask for a procedural vote today — to at least adopt the agenda for this meeting. That would allow us to take a decision according to the letter of the procedure, as the French colleagues wish. It is important to avoid double standards and varying interpretations. If they arose yesterday with

respect to the meeting requested by Russia, we must ensure that they will not arise today. That procedure will continue until we reach an agreement on a normal *modus operandi*.

The President: The representative of France has asked for the floor.

Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to respond to a few points just made by the representative of the Russian Federation. It was said that France had set a negative precedent. I believe that that is absolutely not the case, as the Russian Federation has already requested procedural votes concerning the holding of Security Council meetings. I would like to recall that. Also, I would like to recall that it is not that all decisions regarding the agenda must be made in the Chamber, but only those for which the agenda has not been discussed and agreed upon. My delegation and other delegations have stated repeatedly, since early March, that the meeting that the Russian Federation had proposed for yesterday (see S/PV.9587) was not in line with the wishes of the members of the Council. I wanted to clarify that.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The request of a member of the Council to call a meeting of the Council on the subject that that member asks to discuss is not the subject of consensus-based discussions. I would like to remind the representative of France of that. In any case, I think, now is not the time for a dialogue on procedural matters. We will return to this, as I said. Now I am requesting a procedural vote on the adoption of the agenda for today’s meeting.

The President: In view of the request made by the Russian Federation and comments of members of the Council, I intend to put the provisional agenda to the vote. I shall put the provisional agenda to the vote now.

A vote was taken by a show of hands.

In favour:

Algeria, China, Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The provisional agenda received 15 votes in favour. The provisional agenda has been adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: Before turning to the report, I wish to acknowledge the important message from the Security Council in yesterday's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024). We need a ceasefire now. We need the release of all hostages now. The suffering must end.

This is the twenty-ninth quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). It covers the period from 8 December to 18 March. The resolution 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. Nevertheless, settlement activities have continued and intensified.

In total, some 4,780 housing units were advanced or approved in settlements in Area C in the occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem. Of those, the Higher Planning Committee advanced approximately 3,420 housing units in three settlements in the occupied West Bank, including 2,400 in the Ma'ale Adumim settlement on 6 March. Another 580 housing units were approved in two plans in Area C, in Revava and Mevo'ot Yeriho. In occupied East Jerusalem, 700 housing units were advanced and approved in the Givat Hashaked settlement. In addition to that, tenders for approximately 430 housing units were announced for settlements in Area C in the West Bank.

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 and forced people to demolish 300 structures,

displacing 314 people, including 137 children. Sixteen structures were donor funded. In a continuing trend, 35 Palestinians, including 17 children, left their West Bank communities, citing violence and harassment 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, the devastating conflict in Gaza has continued, alongside daily violence in the occupied West Bank.

In Gaza, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, from 8 December to 18 March, at least 14,550 Palestinians were killed, including approximately 4,200 women and 6,000 children, and at least 27,800 were injured. That brings the total number reported by the Ministry of Health since 7 October to more than 31,790 Palestinians killed, a majority of whom are reportedly women and children.

According to Israeli sources, 134 hostages of the approximately 250 taken hostage on 7 October 2023 are still being held captive. Israeli sources also report more than 1,461 Israelis and foreign nationals killed by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, including at least 338 women, 37 children and 633 members of the security forces, since and including 7 October 2023.

Hostilities remained intense across Gaza, with Israel conducting strikes from air, land and sea, resulting in tens of thousands of casualties, massive displacement of civilians and widespread destruction, including of civilian infrastructure. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups continued to hold civilians hostage, launch attacks at Israeli forces and indiscriminately fire rockets towards Israel.

The Israeli operations in Khan Younis continued, driving tens of thousands more Palestinians, including those already displaced multiple times, to Rafah, where airstrikes have intensified amid concerns of a major Israeli military operation. The fighting has seriously affected the remaining functioning hospitals in Gaza. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that its operations are targeting Hamas fighters and equipment, in addition to tunnel networks and other facilities used for military purposes, including in or under civilian infrastructure.

Law and order are rapidly breaking down in Gaza as desperation grows. On 29 February, more than 100 Palestinians were killed and several hundred more were

injured in an attack involving Israeli forces during an Israeli-coordinated aid delivery operation in northern Gaza. At least 26 attacks on people at aid distribution points have occurred since mid-January. Repeated attacks on health-care facilities have been reported in Gaza, resulting in the deaths of health-care workers, patients and internally displaced people sheltering in those locations.

On 15 March, the Prime Minister's Office announced approval of plans for an Israeli military operation in Rafah, including steps to evacuate civilians from combat zones.

In the reporting period, 39 United Nations personnel were killed in Gaza, bringing the total number of United Nations staff killed since 7 October 2023 to 171.

Meanwhile, violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued at alarming levels, with 159 Palestinians, including two women and 43 children, killed by the Israeli security forces during search-and-arrest operations, armed exchanges, airstrikes, demonstrations and other incidents. One Palestinian was killed by Israeli settlers, and another was killed either by Israeli forces or by settlers. A total of 1,150 Palestinians were injured, including 240 by tear gas inhalation and 394 by live ammunition.

According to Israeli sources, 10 Israelis, including two women, one child and three security forces personnel, were killed, and another 74 were injured by Palestinians in shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks and in rock- and Molotov cocktail-throwing and other incidents. Israeli security forces carried out 1,937 search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, resulting in the detention of 2,119 Palestinians, including at least 72 children. Israel currently holds at least 3,558 Palestinians in administrative detention.

The high number of fatal incidents during the reporting period precludes me from detailing all such incidents, but allow me to highlight a few. Most Palestinians were killed by the Israeli security forces in the context of Israeli operations in Area A, including during subsequent exchanges with armed Palestinians, marked by the use of increasingly lethal weaponry. Incidents include the killing of six Palestinians, including a 14-year-old, on 8 December, in Al-Far'a refugee camp in Tubas; the killing of 11 more, including three children, during a three-day Israeli operation and ensuing armed clashes from 12 to 14 December in Jenin; and the killing of four Palestinians, including

two children, in Tulkarem refugee camp, with five others killed in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus on 17 January. On 30 January, inside a hospital in Jenin, Israeli security forces killed three Palestinians, one of whom was a patient. The IDF said that the three were planning an attack against Israelis. On 4 March, a 16-year-old was killed in Al-Am'ari refugee camp, in the largest Israeli operations in and around Ramallah for years.

Settler-related violence continued, including several attacks recorded in the Jordan Valley, where herding communities are at risk of displacement. On 28 February, Israeli authorities extended the administrative detention of a prominent settler by three months. Violence against Israelis by Palestinians also continued in shooting attacks in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and in Israel. Three Israelis were killed near Ashdod on 16 February; another was killed on 22 February, near the Ma'ale Adumim settlement in a shooting attack on cars; and, on 29 February, two others, including a 16-year-old, were killed near the Eli settlement. Despite some restrictions, on 15 March, thousands of Muslim worshippers participated in Friday Ramadan prayer in Jerusalem's Old City, with minimal confrontations.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for the parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric. Nevertheless, such acts continued. Marking 100 days since the attack of 7 October 2023, a senior Hamas official celebrated and vowed to repeat the event, calling it "a scaled-down model of the final war of liberation". Ahead of the start of Ramadan, Hamas also called on the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to escalate confrontations with Israel. A number of Israeli officials called for the "voluntary migration" of Palestinians from Gaza and the re-establishment of settlements there, with a Minister posting on social media that Israel "should compel them until they say they want it. Continue to pressure them, using force, starvation [and] difficult conditions". An Israeli member of the Knesset called on Israel "to occupy, to annex, to destroy all the houses [in Gaza], to build large and spacious neighbourhoods, large settlements".

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterated 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. Negative trends continued. In Gaza, the humanitarian

impact of the hostilities has been cataclysmic and is worsening daily. Nearly 1.7 million people have been displaced, with almost 1 million sheltering in Rafah. More than 1 million people in Gaza are projected to face catastrophic levels of food insecurity by the end of May and famine in the northern part of Gaza is imminent, according to the most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis. Indeed, starvation-related fatalities have already been reported. Most people have no access to adequate food, clean drinking water or effective sanitation services amid a decimated health system.

The levels of humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian workers remain alarming, negatively affecting the humanitarian response, alongside operational constraints and pipeline limitations. Near daily Israeli denials and delays of coordinated movement, including detentions of humanitarian workers and ineffective deconfliction mechanisms, and the lack of approval for adequate communications equipment and armoured vehicles make humanitarian work extremely dangerous. Aid convoys continue to face attacks, damaged roads and unruly mobs amid a security vacuum. Some progress was made on a maritime corridor from Cyprus, with a first shipment arriving on 15 March, alongside the opening of an access point in the north of Gaza.

On 29 December 2023, the Republic of South Africa instituted proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice concerning alleged violations in the Gaza Strip of Israel's obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. On 26 January, the International Court of Justice indicated provisional measures in the case.

On 29 January, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayeh announced a government reform programme centred on improving accountability, reducing deficits, enhancing revenue and upgrading services. Following Prime Minister Shtayeh's resignation, President Abbas announced Mohammad Mustafa Prime Minister-designate on 14 March.

On 29 February, as per an arrangement agreed to between Norway, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), the PA started to receive the clearance revenues that Israel collects on its behalf. The revenues exclude an amount that Israel says the PA transfers to Gaza, which the parties agreed would be held in

a trust fund in Norway. The fiscal situation of the PA nevertheless remains extremely precarious, with soaring unemployment and poverty rates in the context of increased movement restrictions. Intra-Palestinian discussions took place in Moscow on 1 and 2 March.

During the reporting period, Israel provided information alleging that 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff were involved in the attacks of 7 October 2023. The employment contracts of the active staff members were terminated, and the Secretary-General immediately activated an internal investigation, which has delivered an interim report. He also appointed an independent review group, which visited Israel and Palestine in March to assess whether the Agency is doing everything in its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches.

In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. On 7 March, the Norwegian Government issued a statement outlining that "Norwegian businesses should be aware that, through economic or financial activity in the Israeli settlements that violate international law, they risk contributing to violations of international humanitarian law or human rights". Resolution 2334 (2016) also called upon all parties to continue, *inter alia*, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations. In the context of the current hostilities in Gaza, intense negotiations between international mediators and the parties continued to formulate a deal for the release of the hostages and a ceasefire.

On 1 February, the United States issued an executive order imposing sanctions on persons undermining peace, security and stability in the West Bank. Additional sanctions on two outposts and settlers were announced on 14 March. In total, seven Israeli settlers have been sanctioned under the order. The United Kingdom, France and New Zealand also subsequently announced sanctions against settlers. On 23 February, reverting to United States policy announced in December 2016, the United States Secretary of State stated that the United States views Israeli settlements as "inconsistent with international law".

On 4 March, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict released findings that there are reasonable grounds to

believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred in multiple locations during the attacks of 7 October 2023 in Israel and that there was clear and convincing information that sexual violence has been committed against hostages and reasonable grounds to believe that such violence may be ongoing against those still in captivity. While the scope of the visit in the occupied West Bank did not include verification, the Special Representative stated that she received information about various forms of sexual violence, sexual harassment and threats of rape against Palestinian men and women in detention settings, during house raids and at checkpoints in the West Bank.

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

"First, I once again condemn the horrific armed attacks by Hamas and other groups on 7 October 2023. Nothing can justify those acts of terror. The remaining hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. While in captivity, hostages must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the Red Cross. I am horrified by the findings of Special Representative Patten regarding the use of sexual violence during the attacks of 7 October 2023 and sexual violence committed against hostages, which may well be ongoing. All perpetrators of such acts must be fully prosecuted and held to account. As hostilities continue, I reiterate that there is no justification for the acts of terror that were committed and the deliberate killing, maiming and abduction of civilians and other protected personnel and the use of sexual violence against them. The use of human shields and the firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centres are violations of international humanitarian law and must cease completely.

"Secondly, I am appalled by the immense scale of death, destruction and human suffering wrought by Israel's military campaign in Gaza, with civilian killings at a rate that is unprecedented. I condemn the killing of the thousands of civilians in Gaza, a majority of whom are reportedly women, children and protected personnel.

"Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. I am concerned by what may be violations of international humanitarian

law, including possible non-compliance with the requirements of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attacks. I reiterate that ordering the massive displacement of the population in Gaza without ensuring that basic humanitarian needs can be met raises serious concerns about compliance with the applicable legal requirements. The entry of humanitarian supplies has been far below what is required. Hospitals must be respected and protected by all parties and should never become battlegrounds. International humanitarian law cannot be applied selectively. It applies to all parties to a conflict at all times, and the obligation to comply with it does not depend on reciprocity. I mourn the United Nations staff killed in Gaza. Their courage and dedication will not be forgotten. The inviolability of United Nations premises must be respected at all times.

"The life-threatening conditions facing the more than 1.7 million internally displaced persons within an ever-diminishing space in Gaza must be addressed immediately. I am extremely concerned by the possible nightmare of more than 1 million people being displaced again if Israel proceeds with its planned ground operation in Rafah. The world's leading experts on food insecurity also clearly document that famine in the northern part of Gaza is imminent. Palestinians in Gaza are enduring horrifying levels of hunger and suffering. I call on Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law, including allowing and facilitating rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to and throughout Gaza. The United Nations and humanitarian partners must be able to deliver assistance safely. That means that humanitarian locations, movements and workers must be protected more effectively and that the United Nations be allowed the equipment it needs to increase staff safety.

"I welcome the opening of a maritime corridor to deliver much-needed additional humanitarian assistance by sea but reiterate that for aid delivery at scale there is no meaningful substitute to delivery by land.

"I reiterate my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and urge all sides to redouble efforts to reach an agreement that will bring about a needed humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages. I am engaged tirelessly with all stakeholders towards those objectives and

stand ready to support the implementation of an agreement. I welcome the efforts, including by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, to reach a deal.

“I am deeply concerned by continued high levels of violence and casualties in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. Intensive Israeli security operations and heavy exchanges with armed Palestinians are leading to rising levels of casualties and decimating many West Bank refugee camps. 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 proportionality in the use of force, and ensure thorough, independent and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force, holding those responsible to account.

“I am alarmed by the attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, including in the proximity of Israeli security forces. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to take immediate steps to abide by its obligations under international law to protect the Palestinian population against all acts or threats of violence. I note the measures announced by several Council members and other States against extremist settlers. Attacks by Palestinians against Israelis must also cease. All perpetrators must be held accountable.

“In the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, I reiterate the utmost need to uphold the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, taking into account the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem. I note that prayers at the holy sites have proceeded with minimal confrontations thus far and welcome all efforts to preserve calm. All sides must refrain from unilateral steps that would escalate tensions during this sensitive time.

“I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The ever-expanding settlement footprint, including outposts, further entrenches the occupation, while severely impeding the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank,

including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are in flagrant violation of 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 am disturbed by the multiple instances in which officials have engaged in dangerous provocations, incitement and inflammatory language, which must be rejected by all.

“I am encouraged by steps taken by the Palestinian Authority (PA) demonstrating its readiness to reform and welcome the implementation of the arrangement facilitated by Norway and agreed to by Israel and the PA that enables revenue transfers to the PA. However, the Palestinian economy and fiscal situation remains in crisis, putting the PA at existential risk. I urge the international community to extend immediate fiscal relief to the PA and for the PA to continue carrying out crucial reforms.

“I was appalled by the allegations that 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attacks. Those allegations are being thoroughly and independently investigated, while a review of UNRWA's neutrality is also ongoing. I underscore that UNRWA remains the backbone of the United Nations humanitarian response in Gaza. The Agency remains indispensable and irreplaceable, a lifeline for millions of Palestinian refugees and critical for regional stability. I welcome the resumption of funding by some donors and continue to call on donors to resume funding, as the continuity of UNRWA operations must be guaranteed.

“The enormity of the humanitarian, security and political challenges we are faced with requires a collective, creative and immediate response. We must urgently address the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. I regret that, despite intensive diplomatic efforts, we have not seen an agreement on a ceasefire and the release of hostages.

“It is also important to support efforts to strengthen the PA, to enable it to effectively govern across the whole of the occupied Palestinian territories. Ultimately, any sustainable solution for Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict is political. It is imperative to set the conditions for an agreed political framework that can outline tangible, irreversible steps towards ending the occupation and establishing a two-State solution — Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of United Nations resolutions, previous agreements and international law, with Jerusalem as the 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.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Yesterday we abstained on a Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza until the end of Ramadan and the release of all hostages. We have been clear and consistent in our support for a ceasefire as part of the hostage deal. Because the final text did not have key language we think is essential, like a condemnation of Hamas, we could not support it. However, because it fairly reflects our view that a ceasefire and the release of hostages come together, we abstained.

As Council members know, the United States is engaged in an on-the-ground effort, along with Egypt and Qatar, to secure a hostage release in the context of a ceasefire. Those and other steps detailed in the United States draft resolution last week (S/2024/239) are all things we believe the Security Council should have been able to get behind. We regret that Russia and China instead chose to cynically obstruct the Council's action. We also regret that yesterday's resolution (resolution 2728 (2024)) submitted by the 10 elected members of the Security Council failed to condemn Hamas's terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 and its sexual violence. There is no excuse — let me repeat, no excuse — for the Security Council's failure to condemn Hamas's terrorism. The Council needs to condemn Hamas.

As we all know and as several Council members highlighted yesterday (see S/PV.9586) in their remarks,

a resolution is but one step towards a ceasefire and the release of hostages. To achieve those goals, we need diplomacy on the ground. The United States continues to work with Egypt, Qatar and Israel. As Secretary Blinken has stated, there is a strong proposal on the table. We should all be pressing Hamas to agree to that deal without delay.

The United States also continues to work to surge humanitarian assistance into Gaza, because not enough assistance is reaching civilians in need. The reality is that children are starving to death in Gaza because humanitarian assistance cannot reach them. Children should not be dying of malnutrition in Gaza — or anywhere else for that matter. One hundred per cent of the population of Gaza is experiencing severe levels of acute food insecurity.

While the ceasefire we are working towards would be the best, most immediate way to surge humanitarian assistance, it is not the only way. We continue to coordinate international efforts to establish a maritime corridor, and that includes support for the United States military mission to construct a temporary pier as an additional channel for aid. We also continue to air-drop assistance into Gaza. That maritime corridor and the airdrops are additive, and not a substitute for, essential land access needed into and throughout Gaza to respond to the imminent famine.

Senior Coordinator Kaag has briefed the Security Council on a detailed plan for expanding the flow of aid. The draft resolution drafted by the United States expressed the Council's support for that plan and would have further strengthened Senior Coordinator Kaag's mandate to implement that plan. Russia's and China's cynical vetoes of the resolution (see S/PV.9584), therefore, only served to undercut United Nations efforts on the ground, but we nonetheless remain hopeful that the Security Council can find a way to endorse Senior Coordinator Kaag's efforts and strengthen her mandate.

We continue to advise the Israeli Government against a major ground operation into Rafah. We share Israel's goal of defeating Hamas, which is responsible for the worst massacre of the Jewish people since the Holocaust, and we share the goal of ensuring Israel's long-term security. As we have said, however, a major military ground operation in Rafah is not the way to do it. It risks killing more civilians. It risks wreaking greater havoc with the provision of humanitarian assistance. Therefore, our advice to Israel is that there

is a better way. That is a message that President Biden, Secretary Blinken, Secretary Austin and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield all have communicated to senior Israeli officials in recent weeks and that we will continue to emphasize.

Finally, we reiterate our support for long-term peace and security in Israel and in Gaza. As Secretary Blinken has said, Gaza cannot be used as a platform for terrorism. There can be no displacement of its population. There can be no reduction in its territory or reoccupation by Israel. And we agree that that requires a path to two States, with real security guarantees for Israel. That, however, also requires real reform of the Palestinian Authority, and although we have seen some initial steps in that direction, more is needed. Revitalizing the Palestinian Authority with a better, more representative Government, including Palestinians from Gaza, is critical to achieving the vision of Gaza unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority. The United States continues to work on each of those aspects directly in the region with Israel and with regional partners.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing today.

Israel continues to deal with the brutal horror and aftermath of the 7 October 2023 attacks, and Hamas continues to hold innocent hostages in Gaza. The United Kingdom condemns those attacks unequivocally. Israel has a right to defend itself and ensure such an attack can never happen again.

At the same time, innocent Palestinians are facing unfathomable human suffering in Gaza. The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report stated that there is an imminent risk of famine. Disease is on the rise. A devastating humanitarian crisis is worsening by the day. The United Kingdom agrees with the recommendations in the IPC report.

I wish to make three points.

First, the United Kingdom has long been calling for an immediate humanitarian pause in fighting, to get aid in and hostages out and leading to a sustainable ceasefire. Yesterday's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024) delivered just that. We now need to see its full implementation. We welcome the ongoing negotiations led by Qatar, Egypt and the United States to that end,

and we reiterate our call on Hamas to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages.

Secondly, Israel needs to do more to ensure that significantly more life-saving aid can reach those in need in Gaza. That includes opening the port of Ashdod and Kerem Shalom in full and to their maximum operating capacity, issuing visas to United Nations workers and aid agencies and ensuring effective deconfliction to guarantee the safety of aid convoys. The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have reiterated those messages to Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders in recent weeks.

The United Kingdom has trebled our aid commitment this financial year, and we will keep doing everything we can to get more aid in by land, sea and air to reach those in desperate need in Gaza. We are also deeply concerned to hear reports that Israel has blocked the access of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to northern Gaza. We call on Israel to ensure urgently that the United Nations can deliver food aid immediately to those living in the north, many of whom are at greatest risk of starvation.

Thirdly, we are alarmed by the continued expansion of settlements and unprecedented levels of settler violence in the West Bank, including the most recent Israeli announcement of the designation of 1,976 acres of land in the Jordan Valley as State land. We are clear — settlements are a violation of international law, and we must continue to take further steps to hold to account those who undermine steps to peace in the West Bank.

Finally, we must begin to focus on how we chart the way towards a sustainable peace without a return to fighting. That means removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package, and a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in security and peace.

Ms. Persaud (Guyana): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). My appreciation also goes to Special Coordinator Wennesland for his insightful briefing and the presentation of the Secretary-General's report.

We have heard this morning yet another update on the tragic circumstances to which Palestinians in both the West Bank and Jerusalem are subjected by the occupying Power through deliberate, illegal and sustained policies and practices. Those policies and practices persist despite numerous injunctions by the Security Council and the General Assembly and in contravention of obligations arising from the State of Israel's ratification of several international legal instruments, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Consequently, the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) continues to be seriously impeded.

Allow me briefly to touch on three provisions of the resolution that Guyana views as especially critical in the broader context of achieving the two-State solution.

First, Guyana has taken note of ongoing settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That expansion is accompanied by violence resulting in harm to Palestinian civilians and the destruction of their homes and property. Several senior Israeli Government officials have endorsed those activities, thus emboldening the perpetrators of those illegalities. The recent observation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (see A/HRC/55/72) that the drastic acceleration in settlement-building is exacerbating long-standing patterns of oppression, violence and discrimination against Palestinians and that the policies of the current Israeli Government appear aligned, to an unprecedented extent, with the goals of the Israeli settler movement to expand long-term control over the West Bank and to steadily integrate that occupied territory into the State of Israel mirrors the concern of many, including Guyana. Guyana reiterates that the establishment of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 has no legal validity and is a major obstacle to the two-State solution. Guyana further appeals to the State of Israel to abide by its international obligations in that respect.

Secondly, Guyana recalls that resolution 2334 (2016) calls for steps to prevent violence against civilians and for accountability in that regard. The heinous events of 7 October 2023 and the equally heinous response have set off a humanitarian tragedy of unprecedented proportions in the Gaza Strip. The Strip has been decimated. More than 32,000 Palestinians have been killed. Hundreds of thousands are starving, severely undernourished and on the brink of famine.

Women and children are bearing the brunt of the disaster. Yesterday the Council issued a demand for a ceasefire (see resolution 2728 (2024)), but from all indications, it is not being adhered to. Accountability is still sorely lacking in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is perhaps the reason why crime after crime is committed year after year with seeming impunity. Guyana appeals to the unity of the Council to ensure accountability for crimes against civilians. There is no hierarchy of Member States in this Organization. All are obligated to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations as contained in the Charter.

Finally, the Middle East peace process needs impetus so that the final status issues can be resolved. The Palestinian question must be brought to a definitive and swift end, resulting in a free and independent State of Palestine. The two-State solution is under serious threat, and what should concern us is that the threat is not veiled — it is being broadcast internationally. The prevailing circumstances in the occupied territory and the accompanying international attention to the situation present a unique window of opportunity for the Council to make concerted efforts to advance the two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations is a first and critical step in that direction.

Please count on Guyana's full and constructive support for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question.

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

Yesterday the Security Council demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza by adopting resolution 2728 (2024). It also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages held by Hamas and other terrorist groups. That resolution must be implemented by everyone, as set out in Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. I reiterate our condemnation of the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic, and there is an urgent need to ensure a massive inflow of humanitarian aid, given the imminent risk of famine. Israel must immediately and unconditionally open all existing land crossings. Meanwhile, Israeli settlement activities continue and are even accelerating in the West Bank. France condemns that policy, which runs counter to international law. It will never recognize the

illegal annexation of territories or the legalization of unauthorized settlements. Israel's decision on 22 March to confiscate 800 hectares of land in the West Bank is unacceptable. It is the largest Israeli land confiscation in the occupied Palestinian territories since the Oslo Accords.

France also deplores the forced displacement of Palestinian communities caused by repeated settler attacks. Settler violence must stop, and their crimes must not go unpunished. As the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, indicated to the Israeli Prime Minister on Sunday, initial measures have been taken at the national and European levels against certain settlers, and France is considering further measures in consultation with its partners. France and the European Union do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the areas that came under the administration of the State of Israel after 5 June 1967. France, together with its partners, is actively monitoring compliance with international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). The policy of differentiation thereby seeks to realize the legal distinction between the internationally recognized territory of Israel and the occupied territories.

Today's priority is the immediate cessation of unilateral measures. The acceleration in settlement activity undermines the possibility of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. Those measures endanger the prospect of a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital. We therefore call for the avoidance of any measures that would lead to a conflagration of the situation in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem must be preserved.

There is an urgent need to lay the foundations for a lasting political settlement to implement the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine sharing Jerusalem as their capital. That is the only solution that can assure Israelis and Palestinians of the peace and security that they aspire to. France reaffirms its commitment to ensuring Israel's security and to building a State for Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority has a central role to play in that process, both in the West Bank and Gaza, a process that can be played out only in the context of a unified Palestinian State. France is working actively to that end with the parties as well as all our regional and international partners. We will be proposing an initiative to the Security Council in the next few days.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I too would like to start by thanking Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

I would first like to welcome the adoption yesterday, Monday, 25 March, of resolution 2728 (2024), which “[d]emands an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire” (*para. 1*) in Gaza. Yesterday it was high time to restore the international community's confidence in the Council's ability to act on matters of peace and security. Today it is time to ensure that the parties to the conflict implement the resolution. The immediate ceasefire must lead without delay to a lasting sustainable ceasefire, as the resolution demands. At the same time, peace efforts must be stepped up immediately. Resolution 2728 (2024) is founded on the premise that the parties will respect their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Those obligations include taking concrete steps to protect the civilian population, facilitate the rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and ensure the humane treatment of people who are unable to help themselves — people deprived of their freedom, the wounded or the sick. Health units and hospitals must be respected and protected. They must not be attacked or used outside their humanitarian function in order to commit acts designed to harm an enemy.

As early as October 7 we condemned Hamas's acts of terror and the sexual violence that accompanied them, just as strongly as we called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Their capture and continued captivity also contravene international law, as resolution 2728 (2024) recalls.

The situation in the West Bank reminds us that non-compliance with the resolutions of the Council has grave consequences for peace. As resolution 2334 (2016) states, Israeli settlements are

“a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace” (*para. 1*).

They are illegal under international humanitarian law. Recent announcements by Israeli leaders encouraging their expansion have continued to undermine the quest for peace. In that respect, we condemn the announcement that more than 800 hectares of land in the occupied territory will be confiscated. As we pointed out in our submission to the International Court

of Justice in regard to its advisory opinion on the *Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*,

“the measures taken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory are bringing about fundamental changes, particularly demographic ones, that may take on a permanent character ... running counter to the principles of the law of occupation”.

The lack of protection for Palestinians from settler attacks, threats and intimidation is particularly alarming. Those acts of violence reached record levels in the past few years, levels that according to the Special Coordinator have even been surpassed since 7 October. Switzerland condemns those attacks, which together with the construction of settlements are contributing to the creation of a coercive environment and leading to the forced displacement of Palestinian communities.

We take note of the work of the competent authorities to minimize tensions around the holy sites during Ramadan. We call for respect for the status quo on the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount and for Jordan's role as custodian.

Switzerland continues to believe that a two-State solution that accords with international law and the internationally agreed parameters is the only possible foundation for both Israelis and Palestinians to live in lasting peace, security and dignity. The implementation of the Council's resolutions, especially resolutions 2334 (2016) and 2728 (2024), is essential to that end.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his detailed briefing on the worsening situation in Palestine, in the West Bank as well as in Gaza.

The ongoing hostilities have been devastating the lives of all of Gaza's ordinary civilians for more than 160 days. However, with the Council's adoption yesterday of resolution 2728 (2024), we are finally witnessing a glimmer of hope. Its adoption must ensure that we can reach a turning point in the efforts to break the continuing vicious circle. To that end, as resolution 2728 (2024) demands, an immediate ceasefire should be implemented during Ramadan, leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire, and all the remaining hostages taken by Hamas and other groups should be immediately and unconditionally released. All barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance

should also be lifted. We strongly urge the direct parties to the conflict to scrupulously abide by the Council's right and just demands. In addition, the international community should do everything possible to expand the humanitarian aid at scale. As I emphasized yesterday (see S/PV.9586), the situation on the ground in Gaza after the resolution's adoption must look different from what it did before.

Palestinians belong to their land. Any attempt to relocate them outside Palestine is unacceptable. Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly provides that Israel, as the occupying Power, must abide by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians. That resolution also condemns all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character or status of the Palestinian territory, including through the demolition of homes and the displacement of Palestinian civilians. The repeated provocative rhetoric by Israeli ministers, including calls for the transfer or resettlement of the population in Gaza, is unacceptable. Plans for establishing so-called buffer zones inside the Gaza Strip should not be carried out. The possible ground operation in Rafah must not be realized. It would lead to enormous civilian fatalities as well as mass displacement.

The situation in the West Bank is also increasingly alarming. Last year was the deadliest ever for civilians in the West Bank, and it included 124 child fatalities. We are appalled by Israel's approval this month of plans for more than 3,400 new homes in settlements, and by the seizure of land for additional settlements in the West Bank. The ongoing attacks on Palestinians by Israeli extremist settlers, and the demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli security forces, are all the more disturbing because they are taking place in an environment of near-total impunity. Let us be specific. As resolution 2334 (2016) clearly articulates, settlements in the occupied territory have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. Those activities must cease immediately. Israel should implement measures to prevent all acts of settler violence against Palestinian civilians, and the perpetrators of such acts must be held accountable. The establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory, which jeopardize peace in the short term and the realization of a two-State solution in the long term, is unjustifiable, illegal and invalid.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his report.

Regrettably, each update on the implementation of this resolution depicts an even grimmer picture of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The conflict in Gaza has had a catastrophic impact on civilians. Yesterday's important adoption of a ceasefire resolution (resolution 2728 (2024)) was a vital step towards alleviating that terrible plight. However, as we heard from the Special Coordinator's briefing today, the West Bank is not impervious to the dire repercussions of this war. Rising pressures from continued illegal settlement activity, demolitions, settler violence, intensified Israeli security forces operations and the Palestinian Authority's fiscal and economic insecurity, push the region into further instability.

Malta's position is clear. Settlements are illegal under international law. They are an obstacle to peace and threaten the viability of a two-State solution. We therefore condemn Israel's recent announcement that more than 800 hectares of land in the occupied West Bank have been declared State land. Malta stresses its repeated calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. We firmly reject Israel's policy and actions advancing illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Such acts must not be allowed to take place with impunity. We welcome ongoing efforts towards the realization of a reinforced and revitalized Palestinian Authority that is allowed effective governance in line with the two-State solution, and with Gaza as part of an independent Palestinian State. The international community must offer its support for such actions.

Malta has repeatedly and strongly condemned the horrendous Hamas terror attack of 7 October, including the acts of sexual violence committed and rockets fired at Israeli population centres. We reiterate our call on Hamas to unconditionally release all remaining hostages.

However, the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza also demands our urgent attention. There could not be a stronger indictment of our failure to put an end to this tragedy than the harrowing images of Gazan children suffering starvation. There is an urgent need for an immediate and permanent ceasefire. The Council's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024) is a step in that direction. Only a ceasefire will permit the conditions necessary to properly alleviate those catastrophic conditions. In the words of the Secretary-General, it is time to truly flood Gaza with life-saving aid. The choice is clear: either surge or starvation. In that

regard, we also avail ourselves of this opportunity to reiterate our full support for the Secretary-General. We greatly appreciate his strong leadership and principled approach during this crisis.

Malta stresses that all parties are obliged to comply with international humanitarian law. Israel must allow the unimpeded, safe delivery of humanitarian aid, including through the lifting of all barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale — actions it has failed to undertake to date. We also call for the immediate and full implementation of the order on provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January. We further stress our firm rejection of any ground offensive into Rafah. Any such action will inevitably lead to increased human suffering and casualties. The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a stabilizing entity for the future of Gaza also cannot be underestimated. The international community must continue to ensure that it is appropriately funded. UNRWA's collapse would have devastating consequences for the entire region.

In conclusion, Malta stresses that, now more than ever, there is a pressing need to relaunch peace negotiations for a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict. We stand ready to support any initiatives towards that end, including in the Council. Malta reaffirms its commitment to a political solution based on a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting to receive the briefing from Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland, which is really pertinent to our work. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his valuable and detailed briefing.

For months, the Security Council has been consistently interacting to debate and exchange ideas and proposals on how to address the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and the tensions in West Bank and the wider region, including the efforts towards achieving a ceasefire in Gaza and the unconditional release of hostages and detainees.

Though it was long overdue, yesterday, in line with the mandate of the Charter of the United Nations, we as

a Council were for the first time able, through resolution 2728 (2024), to demand an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan in Gaza, which must lead to a lasting and sustainable ceasefire. That was achieved through the unity and leadership of the 10 elected members of the Council in co-penning resolution 2728 (2024) and with the important cooperation of the permanent members. That unity of purpose and collective action are needed to ensure that that binding resolution is respected by all parties and implemented by Israel and Hamas.

During this holy month of Ramadan, the adoption of resolution 2728 (2024) means that the bombardment and rocket shelling from both sides must stop. The airstrikes — like the one yesterday in Rafah, which resulted in fatalities — must stop. As my delegation indicated yesterday (see S/PV.9586), the fighting, killing, suffering and collective punishment must end. The parties to the conflict are under the obligation to respect the clear demands of the Security Council, and we urge them to fully implement resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023) and 2728 (2024), adopted by the Council since the start of the Gaza conflict. States with influence are once again urged to apply the necessary pressure on the parties to implement those resolutions.

It is worth noting that the General Assembly, through its adoption of resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22; the Secretary-General's invocation of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice's indication of provisional measures in its 26 January 2024 order on the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (*South Africa v. Israel*) all speak to the imperative for an immediate ceasefire respected by all parties, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the urgent need to expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to and reinforce the protection of civilians in the entire Gaza Strip.

Sierra Leone wants to be clear and unequivocal — resolution 2728 (2024) is binding on the parties and all the States Members of the United Nations. Article 25 of the Charter and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970) provide adequate guidance. Let us therefore build on the impetus created to ensure compliance with international law.

Our actions must be driven by the many civilian lives lost — in their homes, in hospitals, in trying to secure a loaf of bread, and the babies who suffocated owing to a lack of oxygen. The narrative for the past five months has been tragic and shocking, with deadly consequences for Palestinians and Israelis. That has been confirmed by the updates received from Special Coordinator Wennesland. Nevertheless, we must be hopeful and resolute that there is a way out if we are willing to work collaboratively, with unity of purpose, setting aside preconceived ideas that will hinder progress. To achieve that, my delegation recommends the following.

First, we call on all parties to the conflict to give their unconditional support to resolution 2728 (2024) and to implement its provisions. Though the expectations are different, for its purpose as an immediate action the major goals have been to save lives, improve the humanitarian situation, curtail displacement and rescue the people who have been unjustly held as hostages and detainees. We want to strongly underscore the nature of Security Council resolutions. Non-compliance by any party is a breach of international law, especially when such actions are a threat to international peace and security.

Secondly, as members of the Security Council, we have acknowledged and expressed support for the complementary diplomatic efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States in the ongoing negotiations for a deal that can lay a foundation for durable peace in Gaza and guarantee the protection of all civilians and civilian objects.

Thirdly, and regarding the West Bank and East Jerusalem, we recall resolution 2334 (2016) and reiterate the call for a cessation of all settlement activities that obstruct the historical landscape and eliminate features that support a two-State solution. We further call on Israel, the occupying Power, to refrain from policies and actions that will ignite tensions and further escalate the fragile situation in the West Bank.

Fourthly, and in order to maintain regional peace and stability, we further call on all actors within the region to adhere to and respect the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions, exercise restraint and avoid inflammatory rhetoric that obstructs the path to lasting peace.

Before I conclude, let me take this opportunity to reiterate Sierra Leone's support for the Secretary-

General and to commend the tireless efforts and sacrifices of the United Nations personnel who have continued to work through the conflict in the Gaza Strip. We equally restate our strong support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian agencies.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone reiterates its call and support for a two-State solution, which is worth reiterating, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, security and stability in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to start today with a number of quotations.

Yesterday in this Chamber, commenting on the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024), the Permanent Representative of the United States said, "we fully support some of the critical objectives in this non-binding resolution." (S/PV.9586, P.5. Shortly afterwards, John Kirby, a representative of the United States National Security Council, said, "It is a non-binding resolution, so there is no impact at all on Israel's ability to continue to go after Hamas". Even after the Security Council adopted resolution 2728 (2024), Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Israel Katz, said that Israel will not end its military operation and intends to fight until the Hamas movement is completely eradicated and all hostages and detainees who are being held in the Gaza Strip are released. I would like to ask the United States delegation if the statements by Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield and other officials mean that the United States of America does not consider Security Council resolutions to be binding on all Member States.

I would now like to cite another quotation, this time from Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations, which says,

"The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter."

Do yesterday's statements by Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield mean that the United States no longer considers itself bound by the provisions of the Charter? Beyond that, is it encouraging Israel to do the same? If so, there is simply no point in our discussions in this Chamber. One of the permanent members of the Security Council has essentially openly declared that it does not

obey the Charter of our Organization, disavowing all the hard-won results of the Council's deliberations, including a historic resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza. With the blessing of the United States, Israel now has carte blanche, despite the Security Council's direct demand, and is not going to stop until it razes Gaza to the ground.

We listened closely to the briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, where the military operation and violent raids by the Israeli armed forces continue, despite yesterday's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024), which unequivocally "[d]emands an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire". I would like to remind everyone that the resolution was supported by every Council member except the United States delegation, which preferred to abstain. Since the beginning of the unprecedented bloodshed in the Gaza Strip, which has claimed more than 32,000 lives and injured a further 75,000 Palestinians, it has taken Washington 173 days and nights to admit how flawed its position was and to finally allow Council members to make the only correct decision.

In general the statement by the United States representative today was striking. He did not say a word about the actual agenda of today's meeting, which is Israel's illegal settlement-building in the West Bank, and he spent all his time justifying to Israel his country's decision yesterday not to block a resolution demanding a ceasefire. Frankly, that does not seem worthy of a great Power. We were particularly surprised by the attempts to besmirch Russia and China, thanks to whom the Council was able to adopt yesterday's resolution rather than the inarticulate and harmful American text that gave Israel licence to continue its operations in Gaza. And lastly, let me once again remind my American colleagues that it was they who prevented the Council from condemning Hamas on 18 October 2023 (see S/PV.9442) by blocking a draft resolution that contained such language. They only have themselves to blame.

In the past 24 hours, 84 people have been killed in Gaza thanks to the fighting on the ground and the Israel Defense Forces' air strikes. The fighting continues, including around the Al-Shifa and Nasser medical complexes. The intensity of the shelling

has forced the Palestinian Red Crescent Society to evacuate all patients who could be moved from Al-Amal Hospital. The incessant bombing means that there is virtually no adequate unimpeded humanitarian access. The Strip is exposed to risks of mass starvation — 80 per cent of Gazans have no access to reliable nutrition — and infectious diseases. And the already catastrophic situation may deteriorate further, as Israel has announced that the ground operation will expand to the Rafah area, where more than 1.5 million people are gathered. On the eve of today's meeting, speaking to troops, Prime Minister Netanyahu once again reaffirmed his intention to invade Rafah.

We support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and are alarmed by today's reports that Israeli authorities have denied UNRWA access to northern Gaza.

Against the backdrop of Israel's deadly cleansing of the Gaza Strip, tensions persist in the West Bank, where equally violent clashes have continued this entire time between the Israeli military and extremist settlers and Palestinian civilians. According to the United Nations, some 500 Palestinians, including more than 100 children, have been killed by the Israeli military and settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 7 October. In addition to actions using force, Israel is continuing its arbitrary arrests of Palestinians — more than 7,500 people have been detained since 7 October — as well as unilateral steps to create irreversible "facts on the ground" and expand Israeli settlements, including the construction of settlement outposts west of Ramallah, in violation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). The West Jerusalem authorities expropriated some 800 hectares of land in the Jordan Valley, the largest confiscation of Palestinian land since 1993. In addition, the Israelis approved the construction of more than 3,500 new housing units in the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim, Efrat and Kedar. In parallel, the forcible seizure of Palestinian property and the demolition of their homes continue.

With the upcoming religious holidays of Catholic Easter on 31 March and Eid al-Fitr on 9 April, the issue of access to Jerusalem's holy sites is very pressing. It is outrageous that the Israeli security forces have prevented thousands of Christians in the West Bank from attending festive Catholic Palm Sunday services in Jerusalem. We call on the authorities in Tel Aviv to

reconsider their approach in that regard and to ensure unhindered access to places of worship in the Old City.

Another final status issue that the Israeli leadership is attempting to remove for good from the agenda is the return of refugees. UNRWA, a specialized agency established in 1949 to support Palestinians — not only in the occupied Palestinian territories but also in neighbouring Arab countries — has been subjected to targeted and comprehensive attacks in the form of undermining its financing and political mandate.

In that regard, we have questions regarding the disproportionality of the measures taken against UNRWA, which lead to the collective punishment of 30,000 Agency staff members and 6 million Palestinians under its care, as well as regarding the lack of concrete information on the allegations made by Israel about the involvement of UNRWA staff in the events of 7 October. At the same time, there are deeply disturbing reports about the torture and ill-treatment of UNRWA staff during their questioning for the purpose of extracting confessions.

The appalling trends I have described result from Israel's complete disregard for its obligations to implement the provisions of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Such disregard threatens to expand the scale of the human and humanitarian catastrophe in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as to escalate violence across the entire Middle East.

We trust that resolution 2728 (2024) will be fully implemented by all parties and United Nations members and will facilitate an end to the violence in Gaza, including preventing the Israeli operation in Rafah, increasing humanitarian assistance to civilians in the Gaza Strip and preventing their forcible deportation, rather than remain a dead letter like its predecessors.

Our duty, as the Security Council, is to ensure strict compliance with resolution 2728 (2024) and the implementation of its provisions on the ground.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): At the outset, I express my gratitude to Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing and reaffirm Algeria's commitment and unswerving support.

I would like to begin my statement by reaffirming Algeria's steadfast support for the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, in the face of the smear campaigns against him. It is unfair. Efforts to conceal the truth will never prevail. Since global public opinion is fully

cognizant of the ongoing realities, history will not be forgiving towards the occupying Power in Palestine.

As the meeting progresses and the briefing echoes similar themes, it is becoming painfully clear that the Palestinian people are still enduring an ever-intensifying plight under Israeli occupation. For more than 75 years, each passing day and each passing hour witnesses an escalation in the suffering of the Palestinian people as the occupation expands its reach, its violence and its crimes. The latest aggression against Gaza marks yet another chapter in a long history of blatant and systematic violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. This brutal military campaign aims to erode the prospects of establishing a viable Palestinian State, rendering the hope of such a State nearly impossible to attain.

The cruel onslaught in Gaza has unleashed killings that target anyone daring to move beyond the confines of the oppression. The toll is staggering, with more than 32,000 lives lost in Gaza. Additionally, more than 74,000 individuals — men, women and children — have been maimed, of whom 12,000 have been left disabled. Shockingly, the number of children killed in Gaza has surpassed the total count of children lost in all global conflicts over the past four years. This is an assault on children; it is an assault on innocence; it is an assault on the very future and existence of the Palestinian people in their homeland.

The crimes perpetrated by the occupation forces have exceeded all imaginable boundaries of decency. Resolution 2728 (2024), adopted yesterday, must be fully implemented. The Charter of the United Nations is clear: Security Council resolutions are binding — not almost, not partly, not maybe. International peace and security is a highly serious matter that is not to be treated lightly. Otherwise, the very existence of this organ, the Security Council, is called into question.

The killing must stop now. Urgent action is imperative in order to expedite the humanitarian relief effort before the spectre of famine materializes, as predicted by the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reports, which are forecasting famine as early as May. In that regard, we condemn the decision of the occupying Power to not allow UNRWA convoys to enter the north of Gaza. This is a war by starvation, and we already have the tool to avoid this catastrophe. It is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

UNRWA is the backbone of the humanitarian action in Gaza. UNRWA is irreplaceable.

Amid that grim reality and the world's focus on the unfolding crisis in Gaza, the occupying Power has boldly sanctioned the expansion of settlements in the occupied territory. Despite the international consensus on their illegality, those settlements continue. They are burgeoning monthly while the Security Council struggles to enforce the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), a resolution adopted eight years ago. That resolution clearly denounces those settlements as a blatant violation of international law and a significant impediment to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The settler community has quadrupled since the 1990s, reaching more than 950,000. Indeed, it is legitimate now to question the fate of those newcomers to Palestinian territories and how the vision of a Palestinian State will take shape amid the ongoing settlement expansions and demographic modifications. That expansionist agenda is a clear blueprint aimed at altering the demographic landscape and the character of the occupied territory. That unlawful presence has ushered in a new era characterized by escalating settler terror violence, which the occupation authorities are complicit in arming in flagrant violation of resolution 904 (1994). Palestinians in the West Bank and in Al-Quds Al-Sharif live in constant fear, unable to safeguard themselves or their properties from settler gangs, shielded by the occupation forces. The year 2023, even prior to 7 October, marked the most violent bloodshed period for Palestinians since the second intifada. The Security Council must urgently explore avenues to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) before the vision of Palestinian statehood is shattered by the steadfast grip of settlers and settlements.

In conclusion, we reiterate our standing support and commitment to collaborate with all stakeholders to safeguard the Palestinian people's rights and enable them to exercise their legitimate right to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I also want to thank profoundly the Special Coordinator for his comprehensive briefing today.

Almost six months into the Gaza conflict, the devastation is unprecedented, and famine

is looming. Therefore, we welcome yesterday's adoption of resolution 2728 (2024), and we call for its swift implementation.

We would like to voice our profound concern over the denial of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East food convoys to the north of Gaza, and we call on Israel to reverse its decision. Let me repeat here again that we condemned, and we continue to condemn, the terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October and Hamas's taking and holding of hostages. However, there is no right to self-defence justifying the starving of the civilian population or the killing and destruction that we are witnessing in Gaza. Wars have rules, and they need to be respected.

We are concerned about the increasingly confrontational statements and actions of Israeli officials towards the Secretary-General and towards the United Nations and its agencies. We are the United Nations, and Slovenia stands with the Secretary-General.

With our eyes on Gaza, we must not forget about the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Therefore, today I would like to focus on the situation there.

First, Slovenia repeats that the establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory has no legal validity and constitutes a violation under international law.

It is particularly concerning that the practices and policies of the current Government of Israel appear to be unprecedentedly aligned with the goals of Israeli settler movement — aimed at expanding long-term control over the West Bank and steadily integrating the territory into the State of Israel. Proof of that are the recent approvals for advancing new housing units, the regularization of settler outposts and the confiscation of land. We expect Israel to reverse those decisions. Moreover, Slovenia expects Israel to halt the continuing practice of eviction and demolition orders against Palestinians, which disproportionately affects Palestinian women and girls.

We are appalled by the recent incidents involving settlers and activists building symbolic outposts in Gaza. We reject any attempt at territorial or demographic change of Gaza, including forced displacement. Such actions contravene international law, and we expect a democratic State to respect the rule of law, including the rule of international law.

Secondly, we are alarmed by the dramatically accelerating trend in settler violence, State violence and the displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank, in particular following the 7 October attacks. We are concerned that settler violence seems to be further accelerated through collaboration with Israeli security forces and even some senior ministers of the Government. That is accelerating the displacement of Palestinians from their land in circumstances that may amount to forcible transfer, which is a war crime, as observed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We welcome that, in an unparalleled step, the European Union will be imposing sanctions on violent settlers.

We are also alarmed by the increase in the use of disproportionate force by Israeli security forces, in the number of raids and in severe restrictions of movement. We are concerned about the dramatic growth in the number of Palestinians arrested and detained in recent months. The International Committee of the Red Cross must be notified of and allowed to visit Palestinians in Israeli detention. We urge all parties to fully cooperate with relevant international bodies.

Thirdly, settlement expansion and violence are a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We therefore support the intensification and acceleration of all international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and a two-State solution. We welcome the appointment of the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, who we hope could be an additional impetus to the political process for two-State solution.

As a cradle of religions, the region is in the midst of numerous celebrations, which could provide an opportunity for reflection and understanding. We express our grave concern about the current situation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and, more broadly, in the region. However, we also hope that this is a turning point. If the current devastation can serve for something good, let that be a strong commitment by all of us to a pathway of peace and understanding, starting with the implementation of resolution 2728 (2024).

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

Yesterday the Council adopted resolution 2728 (2024), with 14 votes in favour and one vote in abstention. The resolution demands an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for the month of Ramadan, leading to a lasting, sustainable ceasefire.

After blocking the Council's effective action on multiple occasions, the United States finally decided yesterday not to single-handedly veto Council decisions. That is noteworthy. However, its significance was diminished by a series of statements and behaviours of the United States after the vote. That makes us question the political will and sincerity of the United States.

I wish to emphasize that all Council resolutions are binding, including resolution 2728 (2024). That is indisputable. Every country joins the United Nations with a commitment to implement the decisions of the Council. That is an obligation under the Charter of the United Nations. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United States should take the lead in honouring that obligation.

We urge Israel to effectively comply with the demands of the resolution and cease its military offensive against Gaza and its collective punishment of the population in Gaza. We call on the United States to play a constructive role in that regard, exerting a positive influence on Israel and using all effective means to support the implementation of the resolution.

More than 170 days have passed since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza. The humanitarian catastrophe is beyond imagination, with millions of people suffering from famine and on the verge of death. The blockade of Gaza and the human-made barriers to humanitarian access must be lifted without delay. We urge Israel to fully open the Rafah crossing and all other land crossings so as to ensure the sufficient, safe and speedy access of humanitarian supplies into Gaza.

Secretary-General Guterres and the United Nations have made tremendous efforts to promote a ceasefire in Gaza and to alleviate the humanitarian disaster there. China fully supports the work of the Secretary-General and the United Nations and firmly opposes malicious attacks against the Secretary-General and the Organization. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays an indispensable and crucial role in easing the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We urge Israel to immediately lift its restrictions on the Agency's relief operations and call on those countries

that have not yet resumed their funding to UNRWA to do so as soon as possible.

While the conflict in Gaza continues, the situation in the West Bank is becoming increasingly tense. Violence by the Israel Defense Forces and the settlers in the West Bank has intensified, resulting in massive casualties among the Palestinians. We call for an effective curb on settler violence and for a thorough investigation into relevant incidents in a manner that ensures accountability.

For Muslims, Ramadan is the most sacred and important time. China urges Israel to guarantee the rights of Muslims to visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to effectively maintain peace and calm at the holy sites.

Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank constitute a serious violation of international law under resolution 2334 (2016) and erode the basis of the two-State solution. China condemns Israel's continued advancement of settlement activities, as well as its recent announcement of new plans for large-scale expansion.

The crux of the protracted Palestinian question lies in the failure to implement the two-State solution and the long-standing disregard for the Palestinians' rights to statehood, survival and return. The current round of the Gaza conflict reminds us once again that we can no longer continue to ignore the fact that Palestine has been under occupation for a long time. Nor can we continue to evade the long-cherished aspiration of the Palestinians to establish an independent State. China calls for greater international and regional diplomatic efforts to reshape a credible multilateral process and to revitalize the political prospects for the two-State solution. We advocate the convening of a larger-scale, more authoritative and more effective international peace conference in order to formulate a timetable and road map for the implementation of the two-State solution. We support Palestine's aspiration to become a full member of the United Nations as soon as possible, and we hope that the Council will put that issue on its agenda in the near future.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): Mozambique welcomes this regular briefing, convened by Japan's presidency, on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We express our gratitude to Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace

Process, for his comprehensive briefing and his tireless dedication, especially during these challenging times, as he continues striving for peace in the Middle East.

The situation in the Middle East remains highly sensitive, with ongoing conflicts and humanitarian challenges. The Council's recent actions demonstrate our commitment to addressing these complex issues and striving for positive change.

Yesterday's adoption of the resolution 2728 (2024) reflects the concern of all 15 Council members regarding the situation in the Gaza Strip. It reaffirms our total commitment to making every effort towards an immediate ceasefire during the month of Ramadan. The goal is to achieve a lasting and sustainable ceasefire.

We have faith that the resolution adopted yesterday, along with previous resolutions, will be implemented by all parties. Hopefully, that should ease the long suffering of the population in Gaza, facilitate the release of hostages and increase the quantity and quality of humanitarian aid. The Council underscored the urgency of ending civilian suffering, emphasizing that saving innocent lives is the singular priority. Let us hope that the resolution leads to positive change and relief for the affected population in Gaza.

Mozambique reaffirms its commitment to actively participate in diplomatic efforts aimed at fostering peace in the region. Our engagement is guided by the principles outlined in the Madrid terms of reference, which underpin relevant United Nations resolutions. We acknowledge the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the ongoing negotiations involving Qatar, Egypt and the United States in the achievement of lasting peace and stability.

We also echo the view that the ongoing establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory is a violation under international law, including the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Therefore, we call upon the occupying Power to cease all settlement activities since they are a major obstacle to a lasting peace.

In conclusion, Mozambique emphasizes the vital importance and urgency of a two-State solution in the Middle East. This is fundamental as it envisages Israel and Palestine's coexistence as democratic States, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I echo the gratitude expressed to Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing this morning, and I reiterate Ecuador's support for his work and that of all the personnel of the United Nations and its agencies.

Just 24 hours ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2728 (2024) demanding an immediate ceasefire during the month of Ramadan and the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages still held by Hamas. The provisions of resolution 2728 (2024) must be fully and immediately implemented, as well as those of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2013), in order to alleviate the situation of civilians in Gaza, allow the hostages to be reunited with their families and allow steps to be taken towards a permanent resolution of the conflict.

The urgent and adequate provision of humanitarian assistance must be our first priority. It is imperative to avert a worsening of the food situation in the Gaza Strip, and placing further barriers to the entry or distribution of food is unacceptable.

Ecuador once again condemns the execrable terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October. The explosion of violence witnessed since then has had heartbreaking consequences, not only in Gaza but also throughout the region.

As I have pointed out every time Special Coordinator Wennesland has presented his briefings to us, it is natural to focus on Gaza, but we must not forget what is happening in the West Bank. There the violence is continuing, as are settlement activities. Last week it transpired that Israel had declared 800 hectares in the Jordan Valley as State-owned land, in what the European Union has described as "the biggest land confiscation since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993".

My country, in line with statement by the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2023/1 of February 2023, strongly opposes all unilateral measures that impede peace, including, inter alia, Israeli construction and expansion of settlements, confiscation of Palestinians' land, and the "legalization" of settlement outposts, demolition of Palestinians' homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians.

I would like to conclude my statement by reiterating my country's conviction that it is more urgent than ever

to move towards a peaceful, lasting and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States — Palestine and Israel — on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

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

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for sharing his valuable and comprehensive updates.

As we approach the passing of six months of the conflict in Gaza, we can only observe the destruction and devastation that have resulted since Hamas's horrifying acts of terror in Israel took place. We once again unequivocally condemn Hamas for its heinous terrorist acts.

Intense Israeli air strikes and ground operations have created an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. With reports of more than 32,000 fatalities and nearly 2 million displaced persons, an immediate ceasefire is desperately needed to save lives and alleviate the suffering in both Israel and Palestine.

Japan is pleased that yesterday the Security Council was finally able to adopt a resolution in that regard (resolution 2728 (2024)), which should lead to a ceasefire for the holy month of Ramadan. We urge the concerned parties to immediately act in good faith, based on that resolution, and we continue to support the ongoing diplomatic efforts, led by the United States,

Egypt and Qatar, towards an immediate cessation of hostilities and release of the hostages.

Japan is deeply concerned about the regional spillover of the conflict. In that vein, a military offensive into Rafah would be catastrophic not only for Gaza, but also across the region, and therefore, it should not be carried out under any circumstances.

We deplore the Israeli Government's recent plans to seize hundreds of acres of land in the occupied West Bank. Israeli settlement activities violate international law, and we call on Israel to immediately cease such actions, as well as other unilateral actions such as settler violence and forcible displacement of Palestinians.

In conclusion, resolution 2728 (2024) illuminates a ray of hope for peace, security and stability in the Middle East. A two-State solution, where Israel and an independent Palestinian State live side by side in peaceful coexistence, continues to be the most viable path towards achieving a sustainable peace in that decades-long conflict. Japan will continue to work constructively with other Council members to that end.

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 12.05 p.m.