



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

**9687<sup>th</sup>** meeting

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New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Lavrov/Mr. Nebenzia/Mr. Vershinin. . . . .	(Russian Federation)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria. . . . .	Mr. Gaouaoui
	China. . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
	Ecuador. . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
	France. . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana. . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan. . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta. . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique. . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea. . . . .	Mr. Hwang
	Sierra Leone. . . . .	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia. . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland. . . . .	Mr. Brühlhart
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America. . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to warmly welcome the Ministers and other high-level representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their participation here today underscores the continuing relevance of the subject under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Earle Courtenay Rattray, Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Sven Koopmans, European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process; and His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Rattray.

**Mr. Rattray:** I am pleased to deliver the Secretary-General's briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. His remarks are as follows.

"Last December, the hostilities in Gaza and Israel, which have created appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma, led to my exceptional invocation of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations. Seven months later, the war rages on. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, more than 38,000 Palestinians have been reported killed, with some 87,000 injured and thousands missing, many of them women and children. According to Israeli sources, more than 1,500 Israelis and foreign nationals have been reported killed, with more than 7,000 injured and 125 hostages still held in Gaza. The humanitarian support system in Gaza is close to total collapse. There has been a complete breakdown of public order. And the spectre of further regional spillover is increasing by the day, as exchanges of fire across the Blue Line between Hizbullah and Israel continue. Nothing can justify the horrific acts of terror committed by Hamas and other armed groups in Israel on 7 October and nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

"In recent weeks, Israeli military operations and fighting have intensified across Gaza. Palestinian armed groups continue to launch rockets from Gaza towards Israeli population centres. Rafah is in ruins and the Rafah crossing remains closed, further hampering humanitarian operations. Almost 2 million people — nearly the entire population of Gaza — have been displaced, many of them multiple times. Nowhere in Gaza is safe. Meanwhile, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification partnership reports that almost half a million people are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity. Communicable diseases are on the rise. The chokeholds on the fuel supply have severely reduced access to water, sanitation, hygiene and health services. The United Nations remains committed to delivering life-saving aid in Gaza, but we face severe challenges and deadly

risks. Humanitarian convoys are frequently unable to collect and distribute life-saving goods in safety, including from the crucial Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom crossing. Attacks on humanitarian aid workers and shelters, as well as strikes on or near health and humanitarian facilities, continue. Lawlessness and criminality are rampant.

“The parties must fundamentally and urgently change their conduct to address those challenges. The humanitarian notification system and other coordination mechanisms are not effective, resulting in delayed and aborted aid missions and the exposure of humanitarians to mortal risk. The United Nations still does not have the necessary security equipment in Gaza to manage the extreme risks that our personnel face. Despite an ongoing dialogue with the Israeli authorities and some improvements, much more is needed. The entry of humanitarian aid at scale and its delivery to all parts of Gaza are essential to the survival and welfare of civilians. We need consistent access through all crossing points and better access to those in need, wherever they are. It is long past time for a safe, enabling environment for effective humanitarian operations in Gaza, in line with international humanitarian law.

“While much of the world’s attention is focused on Gaza, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is facing perilous conditions. High levels of violence persist, including among Israeli security forces, settlers and Palestinian armed groups. Between 7 October 2023 and 17 July 2024, 557 Palestinians, including 138 children, were killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The vast majority of them were killed in the context of Israeli security operations, including during subsequent exchanges with Palestinian armed groups. They included 540 killed by Israeli forces and 10 by Israeli settlers, and in seven cases it remains unknown whether the perpetrators were Israeli forces or settlers. During the same period, 22 Israelis, including nine members of Israeli forces, were killed by Palestinians in Israel and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

“Meanwhile, measures taken by Israel are undermining the Palestinian Authority, crippling the Palestinian economy and driving instability. This month, Israel’s security cabinet approved a series of punitive steps against the Palestinian

Authority, reportedly including the legalization under Israeli law of five Israeli outposts in the occupied West Bank, the advancement of thousands of settlement housing units and demolitions in parts of Area B in the occupied West Bank. At the same time, however, Israel’s Finance Minister lifted a suspension of the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of partial clearance revenues, which Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinians. He also renewed, for four months, the letter of indemnity for Israeli banks that have correspondent banking arrangements with Palestinian banks. Both measures are critical to Palestinian fiscal stability. But once again, much more is required.

“Recent developments are driving a stake through the heart of any prospects for a two-State solution. The geography of the occupied West Bank is steadily being altered through Israel’s administrative and legal steps. The seizure of large land parcels in strategic areas and changes to planning, land management and governance are expected to significantly accelerate settlement expansion. Those developments include the issuance at the end of May of two military orders that transferred powers to, and appointed, a civilian deputy in Israel’s civil Administration. That alarming move is another significant step in the ongoing transfer of authority over many aspects of daily life in the occupied West Bank and a further step towards extending Israeli sovereignty over that occupied territory. If left unaddressed, those measures risk causing irreparable damage.

“We must change course. All settlement activity must cease immediately. Israeli settlements are a flagrant violation of international law and a key obstacle to peace. The violence must end and its perpetrators must be swiftly brought to justice. Israel must ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population.

“The United Nations is sparing no effort to deliver humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza and to secure the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups. Those being held hostage have been suffering, as have their families, for far too long. We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. With the tireless efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States, negotiations to formulate a

deal for the release of the hostages and a ceasefire have continued with some progress reported. The parties must reach such a deal now. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is a moral stain on us all. International humanitarian law must be respected at all times and by all parties. We must intensify our efforts to increase humanitarian aid delivery. International support to those efforts is critical, particularly for the essential work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Amid continued reports of serious abuses of Palestinians in Israeli custody, I reiterate that all detainees must be treated humanely and those held without lawful cause must be released.

“And this terrible war must end. We must refocus on finding a political solution that will end the occupation and resolve the conflict in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Ensuring that governance is restored in Gaza under a single, legitimate Palestinian Government is essential to that effort. Support to the Palestinian Authority is critical. Its institutions must be strengthened so that it is prepared to govern and lead recovery and reconstruction efforts in Gaza. Everyone with influence must take the urgent steps needed to enable the parties to re-engage on the long-delayed political path towards ending the occupation and resolving the conflict. That must occur in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States — Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both. The United Nations will continue to support all such efforts.”

That concludes the remarks of the Secretary-General.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Rattray for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): At the outset, Sir, allow me to express our appreciation for your decision to take part in and preside over this ministerial-level meeting and to thank the Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General for his briefing.

There is an old Greek proverb that says, “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in.” Such is the international law-based order, put in place, tree by tree, by people who endured or witnessed the worst possible tragedies, in order to provide shade to future generations.

Israel has uprooted every one of those trees in Gaza. It has breached every rule ever devised, every principle that humankind has ever pledged to uphold. It has killed those most entitled to protection — civilians, including children, humanitarians, doctors and journalists. It has defied every nation on earth and every entity ever set up to uphold the most fundamental rules, from the highest political organs to the highest judicial body, from the Security Council and the General Assembly to the International Court of Justice. It is doing so unapologetically. It is committing crimes openly, brazenly and repeatedly. Its own soldiers do not hesitate to share recordings of those crimes with the rest of the world. What is happening in Gaza will go down as the most thoroughly documented genocide in history.

How long will the world go on denouncing the crimes while tolerating their recurrence? How long will it go on believing that its responsibility is to state the law rather than uphold it? The Palestinians in Gaza do not need to hear the world talk about the trees that have been uprooted. They need their protective shade. They could not care less that we all agree on what the rules say and that we have all observed and recognized that they have been broken. What is a rule when it is not enforced? What do the rules mean any more when for nine months Israel has bombed homes, hospitals and schools — including those designated as United Nations shelters — and is now bombing people in tents, as was the case in Al-Mawasi. How cruel can people be — and how criminal do they have to be — to bomb the same population over and over and over again?

And since bombs and bullets are not good enough in this collective punishment and genocide enterprise, Israel has decided to impose the most horrific conditions on those who survive. For months now we have seen Israel manufacture a humanitarian catastrophe with famine at its core. We have seen it wield starvation, dehydration and the spread of disease as its ultimate weapons. Two million people who had been subjected to a 17-year blockade have now been confronted with a hermetic siege, dying of hunger and disease while food and medicine are available only metres away. Until now, Israel considered that it was

enough to invoke security to get away with the worst crimes imaginable, as if its security could legitimize genocide, colonization, war crimes and crimes against humanity; as if its security could justify denying the most fundamental rights of a nation and the most basic rights of millions of Palestinians; and as if its security could be achieved by more killing and more injustice. Israel pretended that the blockade was about security, but it harmed only innocent civilians. It pretended its walls and military rules were about security, but their true colonial nature is evident to all who are willing to see. It pretended that every war would be the last and would achieve deterrence, but each one simply laid the seeds for another war a few years later.

Successive Israeli Governments have been saying since 1948 that they had got rid of the Palestinian problem once and for all, starting with the Nakba, one of the most terrible attempts to uproot an entire nation in modern history. After that, Israeli leaders pretended that they had never heard of Palestine or the Palestinians, denying the very existence of the people they had killed and expelled. In 1967, they were certain that by occupying whatever was left of the land of historical Palestine, they had eliminated the problem altogether. In 1982, they explained that if they invaded Lebanon and forced the Palestine Liberation Organization to move far from Palestine's borders, that would be the end of the Palestine question. In 1988, when the Palestinian rebellion erupted in Palestine itself in a peaceful way, Israel explained that breaking the bones of the demonstrators — literally breaking them — would deter them. In 2000, it explained that the best way to deal with the second intifada was more walls, more oppression and more occupation. In 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2022, it explained that a blockade of more than 2 million people, repeated military assaults and firing on demonstrators would eventually lead to subjugation and surrender.

It has been a century of military responses to a political question, a century of sheer violence against an entire nation, aimed at avoiding the only possible solution — freedom for the Palestinian people and peace for all. But there is a reason that Israel behaves this way. Everything in its history tells Israel that it will get away with that behaviour. It is betting that this time will be no exception. But this time must be the exception. And change must start right now.

The Security Council adopted resolution 2735 (2024) to achieve an immediate ceasefire leading to a

permanent cessation of hostilities. It cannot restore the lives of the people who have been killed or the limbs of amputees. It cannot assuage the pain in a mother's heart or the fear haunting a child's mind. But it could save lives and stop the march of agony. It could lead to the release of hostages and prisoners on both sides. It could enable a surge in humanitarian aid. It could lead to immediate de-escalation in the region. It could help preserve whatever faith is left in our multilateral system. But Netanyahu does not care about the lives of Palestinians or even of the hostages. He does not care about international law or human decency. He cares only about his own political survival. What, then, will the Security Council do to ensure that he is not the one calling the shots? Here I am addressing the Council directly. What will it do to stop that lunatic from continuing this genocidal war on the Palestinian people?

In recent weeks there have been collective statements stressing that the decisions of the International Court of Justice are binding and must be respected, defending the independence of the International Criminal Court and rejecting attacks on it. There have been shared commitments on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — commitments to which all Council members, present and incoming, subscribed, together with more than 100 countries around the world. There is a global consensus in support of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and a two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law. There is more convergence on the Palestine question than on any other matter on the international agenda. And there is one isolated, fanatical Government that rejects that international consensus and attacks every institution entrusted with upholding the international law-based order, accusing the representatives of that order of terrorism and antisemitism and of killing, detaining, torturing, harassing and intimidating them. How long will we go on pretending that its Government is anything other than what it proclaims itself to be? How long will its whims trump international will?

Our people will live in freedom and dignity on their ancestral land. They will accept nothing less and nothing else. But exercising that right should not come at such a price. There is a parallel world in which the international community upheld the rules and all nations gathered and took concrete steps to ensure compliance and deter violations, to stop the war and advance peace. In that parallel world, no Palestinian

or Israeli civilians, no Palestinian or Israeli children are harmed. In that parallel world life has prevailed, with two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security. Palestine is free, and future generations take for granted the peace we have achieved. In that parallel world, historians work together to tell the story of our painful journeys with honesty and respect; mutual recognition is self-evident; shared humanity is recognized; no one denies the existence of the other, discriminates against the other or denigrates the other; and our region has unleashed its full potential, because our destinies no longer collide but can move forward together.

Being killed, maimed, oppressed, detained, starved and displaced is not our fate. There is a path that leads to shared peace and prosperity. It is the Council's duty to take every step necessary to reach that destination. It must start today by strengthening those who seek peace, rather than arming those who seek extermination; sanctioning those who colonize, rather than allowing them to punish those who oppose the uprooting and displacement of communities; protecting the victims, rather than the perpetrators; and recognizing the Palestinian State, rather than witnessing the destruction of the two-State solution. The Council's relations with the parties must be predicated on their compliance with the law and the legitimate requirements of peace. The Council must achieve the well-known solution to this political conflict by ending the Israeli occupation, rather than waiting until it is transformed into a never-ending religious war.

In two days, the highest judicial organ on Earth will render its authoritative opinion on the question of Palestine and on the illegality of the colonial, annexationist and supremacist Israeli occupation. I am referring to the International Court of Justice. This expression of the law — nothing less and nothing else — should serve as the basis for our collective action in the days to come. Just as all nations refuse to forego their rights, the Palestinian people will never relinquish theirs. Peace will not be achieved at the expense of our rights, only through their preservation. Upholding our right to life, liberty and dignity is the only path to peace. Let us finally collectively embark on that journey.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Erdan** (Israel): Tomorrow will mark 30 years, to the day, since a joint Iran and Hizbullah terrorist operation attacked a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires, murdering 85 people and injuring hundreds of others. This should be a stark reminder of two things.

First, it should remind us that Iran has been obsessed with killing Jews everywhere, not only in Israel.

Secondly, it should remind us that Iran has global reach and is exporting its bloodshed and destruction to the four corners of Earth. This has been going on now for decades. Nevertheless, as we meet today to once again discuss the security situation in the Middle East, instead of focusing on the root of the problem, the Council will again focus on a symptom and not the cause. It is the same old discussion, which brings us no closer to peace or security — not for Israel, not for the Palestinians, and not for the region.

The true reason for the destruction, devastation and bloodshed is apparently never to be named and addressed here. It is there for all to see, but there is seemingly a wilful blindness here to name it. The Council regularly ignores it. We also heard it today from the Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, who preferred to focus on Israel, which is always easier. There is a country in our region that is a rogue and failing State: the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is failing its people and has subjugated its citizens since 1979, when it launched a revolution that only brought destruction. If one looks at all of the major conflicts in the Middle East, one finds the nefarious fingers of Iran. The people of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and many others have all suffered because of Iran's attempts to inflame the region. Iran condemns and attack nations making peace with the State of Israel, as some Arab and Muslim nations have done in recent years.

However, Iran's leaders still receive the red-carpet treatment here due to hypocrisy or political interests. Since the beginning of the Islamic revolution, we have heard the refrain "death to Israel" and "the Zionist regime will be wiped from the pages of history" or "from the face of the Earth" being chanted at rallies, and they have draped their ballistic missiles with those genocidal slogans as they parade through the streets. Only one month ago, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei published on his X account, "death to Israel", seven times — a clear call for genocide. Even the Iranian delegation to the United Nations a few

weeks ago tweeted an open threat for the destruction of Israel. Recently, Iran launched over 350 missiles and drones at Israel. What more needs to happen?

Iran has taken its annihilationist obsession against the Jewish State to a whole new level with the digital countdown clock in Tehran showing how many days remain until the destruction of Israel by the year 2040. Here is a picture of that clock in the centre of Tehran, and it has been ignored for too long. Do not look away; this is not a minor issue. It tells everyone the indisputable intention of the Iranian regime. It is a disgrace, and it will be the Council's disgrace if it continues to be ignored. With the dozens of conflicts raging across the globe, there is no other United Nations Member State publicly calling for the countdown to the destruction of another United Nations Member State. Where is the outrage? Where is the condemnation? Where is the action? Where are the Council resolutions?

This is a direct attack on the Charter of the United Nations. If nothing is done about these openly genocidal obsessions, then the Council will finally lose even its pretension as a force for peace. This clock is a warning for Israel, but also a warning for the world. If the world looks away from the open and wanton call for the destruction of our nation, then another nation could be next.

I demand action. There should be no more meetings with Iranian officials until they have removed this clock, stopped supporting and financing terrorism and ended calls for my country's destruction. Without such action, the State of Israel can only assume that this position is, at best, not taken seriously enough and, at worst, is privately endorsed by some Council members.

These are not mere words, because while the clock continues to tick, the uranium enrichment centrifuges continue to spin. In April, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that Iran is weeks away from having enough enriched uranium to develop a nuclear bomb. Last month, the IAEA Board of Governors called on Iran to abide by its international commitments and cease the dangerous development of its nuclear programme.

Today Council members will once again debate the merits of Israel's justified response to the pogrom against Israel on 7 October. It was a Hamas pogrom financed and inspired by Iran, a pogrom that Iranian officials openly support. Since 7 October, the State of Israel has been attacked — totally unprovoked — from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. All of the terrorist

groups targeting us have one thing in common, and the Council knows it — they are being directed from Tehran. If we reach a situation of full-scale war in Lebanon, it is only because Hizbullah has shot thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians, with the support and funding of Iran. The Council cannot say that it did not know. All of this requires immediate action by the Council.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not just an Israel or regional problem. Iran has supplied military equipment to be used against Ukraine, as Council members know. Its proxies have turned one of the major global shipping lanes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden into no-go areas for international cargo ships. Council members all know that Iran stands behind those Houthi terror attacks, but they continue to bury their head in the sand and focus on us. Why?

Iran is the greatest threat to global stability because its ambitions and destruction are global. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the key to security and stability in the Middle East, and Council members ignore the key. The greatest outrage and most urgent issue to address are our 120 hostages, who are held by Iranian-supported and -inspired terrorist organizations in Gaza. We demand their immediate and unequivocal release. We saw again only yesterday pictures of trembling 18-year-old girls with injuries on their bodies and fear in their eyes. We do not dare to think what horrors they are experiencing at this very minute. I ask Council members — I beg Council members — to look into their eyes and think about the sheer brutality of what Hamas is doing to them.

The disgraceful situation of the hostages alone is a crime against humanity, but Hamas continues to exploit the Council's inaction by hiding its commanders among civilians and its military positions in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools. Yes, they hide themselves in UNRWA schools, and Council members continue to ignore that.

I can tell the Security Council this: the war will not end until those hostages have been released. We will not leave a single hostage behind. With that brutal kidnapping, Hamas is again copying the example of their paymasters in Tehran who, starting in November 1979, as we all remember, held 53 American citizens for 444 days against all international norms and humanity. That was the first warning about the intentions of the Ayatollah regime, and now we are merely talking

about their most recent bloody outrage. For 45 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been fanatical about exporting its brand of terror and bloodshed near and far. If the Council continues to ignore the destructive role Iran plays in all Middle East conflicts, then sadly there will be war, and the bloodshed will continue unabated. But if Council members choose to address the issue properly, we can improve the chances of peace and security in the region. The choice is urgent. The choice is theirs.

The countless lives of those who will die because of the Ayatollah's grand ambitions for Shiite regional supremacy are in their hands. Iran wants to export their supremacist Shiite revolution to Council members' nations, and their weapons are armies of terror proxies causing death in every country they touch. Council members must not be fooled by the sham election and the reformist new President of Iran. They know that he is merely another puppet of the Ayatollah to try to avoid diplomatic pressure and put a pleasant mask on evil. Council members must look at Iranian officials' deeds and not listen to their empty words, which they will probably hear today. Those who continue to accept the fake nice words of Iranian officials know that they are just speaking with puppets directed by the Ayatollah. The Ayatollah has become used to the Council's inaction, and he feels that it gives him the green light to attain nuclear weapons and the immunity to continue expanding the terror of his murderous proxies.

I have shown the Security Council the Iranian countdown clock to the destruction of the State of Israel. That is a promise for a continuation of conflict and war for decades to come. That is a direct threat and incitement to genocide. Nevertheless, I will face that threat with a prediction. If the Ayatollah regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to threaten the region, intimidate its own people, attack its neighbours and spill blood across the globe, it will find that its days are numbered. The proud Iranian people have had enough. The good people of the Middle East have had enough, and so have we. They all are waiting for the members of the Council to pinpoint the true cause of the conflict and bloodshed in our region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a rogue State that is exporting its mayhem and destruction to all corners of the region. They are much bigger and more powerful than the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and with near-nuclear weapon capabilities. Iran's genocidal ambitions are not just a missing element in any

conversation on Gaza. They are the central element. Without taking meaningful action against Iran, the death and bloodshed will only increase and spread. That is the truth about the multiple front war against the Jewish State. It is time that the Council addressed the true root cause of the war.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

The Middle East is facing unprecedented risks to the security, well-being and peaceful lives of its peoples. The waves of violence are spilling far beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict zone and are destabilizing the situation in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and North Africa. A frank and honest conversation is needed about how to immediately stop the bloodshed and suffering of the civilians and move towards a long-term solution to both long-standing and relatively new conflicts.

Our country has historically maintained good relations with all the countries in the region. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was the first State to recognize Israel de facto and de jure, having established diplomatic relations with it shortly after it declared independence in May 1948. Meanwhile, Moscow has steadfastly supported the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State and the realization of the Palestinians' legitimate and fundamental right to self-determination. In 1949, we supported Israel's application for United Nations membership, provided that — which I stress — General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III) on the partition plan for Palestine and the right of return of Palestinian refugees were implemented. That was clearly stated when we voted in favour of admitting Israel as a Member of the United Nations (see A/PV.207). Likewise, today we support the membership of Palestine in our Organization. I would like to note that its sovereignty as a State has already been recognized by nearly 150 States Members of the United Nations.

We maintain a position based on the norms of international law within the framework of various international formats for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and, more broadly, the Middle East conflict. We proceed from the imperative of implementing United Nations decisions, including the aforementioned first resolutions of the General Assembly and key Security Council resolutions 242

(1967) and 338 (1973), adopted after the end of the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, as well as resolutions 478 (1980) and 497 (1981) on the status of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

We attach special importance to dialogue with the Arab States and their neighbours Iran and Türkiye. From the very beginning, we appreciated the constructive potential of the Arab Peace Initiative, launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2002. At the same time, as members know, we respected the decision of a number of Arab States to normalize their relations with Israel before resolving the Palestinian question. We advocated for the inclusion of pan-Arab and Islamic organizations — the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation — in the collective efforts of the Quartet of international mediators, which was unfortunately buried under the ruins of the United States so-called “deal of the century”.

The colonial, mandate-based history of the Middle East and North Africa left a heavy legacy for the countries of the region that still continues. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration and the so-called White Paper of 1939 planted time bombs that have continued to go off to this day, and the situation has been further complicated by new Western geopolitical experiments. We firmly believe that the countries of the region should choose their own paths, free of foreign interference, towards stronger sovereignty, independence and socioeconomic development for the benefit of their nations. That would enable them to strengthen the enormous global historical, civilizational, religious and cultural significance of the Middle East and North Africa in the interests of peace and stability.

The most pressing and acute issue of the day is that of Palestine. This is the fourth time in 10 months that the Council has met at the ministerial level. While it has adopted four resolutions (resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024)), the continuing bloodshed in the occupied Palestinian territory has shown that all those decisions remained on paper only. Russia has consistently denounced terrorism in all its manifestations. We unequivocally condemned the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. However, the current developments in Gaza constitute an unacceptable collective punishment of the civilian population. For close to 300 days a military clearance operation has been going on in the Gaza Strip, the most densely populated area in the world, which for years

has been termed an open-air prison. The statistics of the death and destruction that have resulted from the large-scale military operation that Israel is waging jointly with its American allies are horrifying. For 300 days — let us say, 10 months — almost 40,000 Palestinian civilians have been killed and 90,000 wounded, a majority of them women and children. That total is twice as large as the number of civilian casualties on both sides of the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine in 10 years. Those 10 months resulted in twice the number of civilian casualties brought about by the 10 years of the conflict in Ukraine, since the coup d'état of February 2014.

According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry that examines violations of international humanitarian law, Palestinians under the age of 18 make up approximately half of Gaza's population. That means that they were born and grew up in conditions of a total blockade. Apart from the current escalation of violence, they have seen other Israeli military operations — Operations Summer Rains and Autumn Clouds of 2006; Operations Hot Winter and Cast Lead, in 2008 and 2009; and Operations Pillar of Defence, in 2012, Protective Edge, in 2014, and Guardian of the Walls, in 2021.

Today Gaza lies in ruins. Almost all residential buildings, schools and hospitals have been turned to rubble and critical civilian infrastructure has been rendered inoperable. There is an epidemic of infectious diseases and mass hunger in the Strip, which has become a true humanitarian disaster. There is no safe and reliable access to the victims and those in need amid the ongoing hostilities. The number of casualties among the humanitarian staff of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations is already approaching 300 — the largest number of losses at one time for the United Nations in modern history. Many of them were killed together with their families, and we want to express our condolences to their relatives, loved ones and colleagues.

On 7 May Israel began its clearance operation in the city of Rafah, the last refuge for the 1.5 million Palestinians who had fled there from all over Gaza. The Rafah crossing was closed, once again making the Gaza Strip “the only conflict in the world in which people are not even allowed to flee”, as Secretary-General António Guterres said in 2009 when he was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Nothing has changed since then. The situation has only deteriorated further.

The border crossings on the Israeli are operating intermittently and with major restrictions. The volume of cargo allowed through them is significantly lower than it was even before the current confrontation, despite the fact that the needs then were far fewer.

The situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is also dire, with constant military raids and acts of aggression by settlers, leading to casualties on both sides. Contrary to resolution 2334 (2024), Israel has not only not slowed its construction of illegal settlements but is actually expanding it. In addition to seizing Palestinian land and demolishing homes, it is retroactively legalizing settlement outposts there, even though they are illegal under Israeli law as well. As Mr. Rattray said, such unilateral actions aimed at creating irrevocable facts on the ground amount to a gross violation of Israel's responsibilities as an occupying Power. I particularly want to point out that by an irony of fate, those responsibilities flow from the Geneva Conventions, adopted 75 years ago largely to protect the Jews who had been subjected to inhuman suffering during the Second World War and to prevent the persecution of peoples based on their nationality in the future.

The current unprecedented outbreak of violence in the Middle East is largely a result of the well-known policies of the United States in the region, the legacy of that same diplomacy that the United States representatives who have been demanding that the Council reduce its efforts have been telling us is so effective for the past almost 10 months. And my United States colleague Secretary of State Antony Blinken, has made the same appeal. Again and again, they have used their right of veto to block the calls for an immediate, permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. After the adoption of resolution 2728 (2024), on a ceasefire during Ramadan, the United States promptly said that it was not a legally binding document. In its place, we were offered the notorious so-called Biden plan, which the Americans wanted to have approved even before Israel had responded to it. Everyone knew that the response would be negative, because Israel had no interest whatever in any plan with a hint of peace. And we became convinced of that once again today. I wonder if the United States representative had the feeling, while listening to the Israeli representative's remarks, of being in the wrong room, attending the wrong discussion, rather than the one that had been announced. I hope she knows what I mean. And it was

for that very reason that we abstained in the voting on resolution 2735 (2024), because we knew that Israel had already a priori rejected it. By providing diplomatic support for Israeli actions and supplying weapons and ammunition, Washington — as everyone realizes — has become a direct party to the conflict, just as it has in Ukraine. The bloodshed would stop if that support ended but the United States is either unwilling or unable to do that. It appears that manoeuvres aimed at scoring points during an election campaign are more important than efforts to save human lives.

I would like to outline Russia's principled approaches once again. We condemn the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack, which nevertheless cannot justify Israel's current actions and the undermining of the very idea of a Palestinian State. We support a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire that would enable the release of the 120 Israeli hostages and the approximately 9,500 Palestinians who have been arbitrarily arrested since 7 October 2023. We call for safe and adequate humanitarian access to all who are affected and in need. We reaffirm the key mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as a unique body for the provision of aid to the Palestinians in the occupied territory and in neighbouring Arab countries. We insist on the immediate cessation of unlawful settlement activities.

Addressing those urgent issues would create the conditions for a return to peace negotiations on a universally recognized international legal basis, in the interest of establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian State coexisting in peace and security with Israel. Only then will the historical injustice done to the Palestinian people be redressed and that people's fundamental right to self-determination upheld.

It is also very important to restore intra-Palestinian unity. We have always tried to facilitate that process by providing representatives of various Palestinian movements the opportunity to conduct much-needed dialogue through the Moscow platform. We are convinced that Palestinians are capable of independently determining their own future without external interference, no matter how much anyone might wish to decide everything for them and against their will. And that, by the way, also applies to the future of Gaza, as an integral part of the Palestinian State. We are all well aware of the behind-the-scenes contacts that are under way and the plans that are being hatched in an attempt to predetermine the future of

Gaza and the entire Palestinian State, although there is no mention of the Palestinian State itself in those plans. We believe that everyone must respect the principle of “no discussion of Palestine without Palestine”.

Our proposal to bring together all external actors who have influence on the various factions in Gaza and the West Bank — and who can, if they speak with one voice, help to overcome divisions within the Palestinian ranks — remains on the table. An important step in that direction was taken in Moscow in February, when all the Palestinian factions sent their delegations to Moscow in order to reaffirm their support for restoring unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform.

Today we all have a responsibility to stop the human tragedy that is unfolding. In addition to the military operation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel's other neighbours are also at risk of being drawn into a major confrontation with Israel. Tensions along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel are growing by the day. Israeli officials have publicly announced plans to open a northern front. Hizbullah is also prepared to join the fray and warns of its readiness to repel the invasion. The Israeli Air Force has increased attacks across Syria, including the areas around Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia and the Golan Heights. The strikes have hit key airports and a seaport that played an important role in the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid, including as part of the response to the devastating earthquake of 2023.

Ending the violence in Gaza and the West Bank could create the conditions not only for finding a lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but also for tackling other crisis hotspots throughout the vast expanse of the Near and Middle East, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, instead of furthering certain geopolitical ambitions or rules that the West is trying to use to replace the Charter of the United Nations.

Pan-Arab and pan-Islamic organizations, the activities of which we support — as we do the efforts of all truly responsible members of the global community — have an important role in upholding the rights of the Palestinian people. In particular, I would like to note the importance of the Gulf States. Now, after the early elections in Iran and the initial statements by the new Iranian President, Masoud Pezeshkian, there is hope for rapprochement among all the countries of the Gulf, in the interest of overcoming long-standing

differences and distrust and joining efforts on a mutually acceptable basis, the aim being to determine the parameters of their own mutual security without external interference and to speak with one voice, in order to fulfil the aspirations of the Palestinian people and, more broadly, to build an architecture of stability and good-neighbourly relations in the region.

Progress on the Palestinian track, in full compliance with United Nations decisions, and progress towards the normalization of relations between the Gulf countries could constitute important contributions to the ongoing process of forging a common Eurasian architecture based on the principles of the indivisibility of security, equal collective responsibility, mutual respect and a balance of interests.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Brülhart** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Rattray for his briefing.

Switzerland is alarmed by the situation throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and on both sides of the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon. We must work tirelessly to restore peace and security in the Middle East. Switzerland has strongly condemned the acts of terror and hostage-taking perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. Those acts were followed by a deadly war in Gaza and unprecedented levels of violence in the West Bank.

During a recent trip to the region, I once again witnessed the extent of the suffering inflicted on civilians on both sides. They continue to pay the heaviest price for the violations of international law committed by all parties. That includes the thousands of children who have been killed or maimed. Furthermore, the lack of implementation of the four resolutions adopted by the Security Council since 7 October 2023 (resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024)) is unacceptable. We must intensify our efforts to break the spiral of violence and return to the principles of humanity that have been flouted for too long in this conflict.

Switzerland calls for an immediate ceasefire and the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. We encourage the parties to conclude and implement an agreement to that effect as quickly as possible. We thank the mediators for their tireless efforts. All persons

deprived of their liberty must be treated humanely and receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Humanitarian access must be provided throughout the Gaza Strip via all possible crossing points and in a safe, rapid and unhindered manner. The situation is urgent. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 96 per cent of civilians are at risk of starvation. That is unacceptable. The civilian population, persons hors de combat and civilian property, such as residential buildings, schools and hospitals, must not be attacked. We condemn all attacks of that kind in the strongest possible terms, whether they take place in Gaza or elsewhere in the world. Respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities is an obligation under international humanitarian law, and that also applies in the context of the fight against terrorism. In resolution 2730 (2024), the Council reiterated the need for the protection of personnel and property employed in humanitarian operations.

A ceasefire in Gaza will make a major contribution to regional de-escalation, but that is not enough. To return to the path of peace, compliance with international law in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is essential. To that end, Israel must refrain from taking measures that would introduce permanent changes, in particular demographic and administrative changes, in the occupied territory. However, we note with concern the transfer of civil governance in the West Bank and the recent announcements of the construction of housing units in the settlements. Those measures contribute to the prevailing coercive environment, leading, in turn, to the forced displacement of Palestinian communities and the weakening of the Palestinian Authority.

The settlements are illegal under international law. They are a major obstacle to peace and to the implementation of the solution of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. Only a political solution will bring lasting peace to the Middle East. The way forward begins with compliance with international law and dialogue between the parties to the conflict, the States of the region, the members of the Security Council and other key players. My recent discussions in the region and beyond have confirmed that such a path requires the support of us all. Switzerland is ready to play its part alongside the Council in this difficult

but necessary process and in supporting all efforts to reopen the path to peace.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for his briefing on behalf of the Secretary-General.

In 1950, Ralph Bunche won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work helping sow peace in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbours. In his lecture in Oslo, he said something prescient, something that rings true three quarters of a century later. He explained that,

“[t]he world and its peoples being as they are, there is no easy or quick or infallible approach to a secure peace. It is only by patient, persistent, undismayed effort, by trial and error, that peace can be won”.

As the Council knows well, nothing about securing peace is easy, and progress is certainly not as quick as we all wish it would be. We see that in the ongoing talks for an immediate ceasefire with a hostage release in Gaza. And yet the United States, Qatar, Egypt and so many of our other partners remain persistent. We have worked tirelessly to facilitate the deal that the Council endorsed in resolution 2735 (2024), a deal that would bring about an immediate ceasefire with the release of hostages, would surge aid to Palestinians in need and create a path to longer-term peace and stability in the region.

Because of our unity and because the Council was able to speak with one voice and back a concrete, realistic plan, there has been progress: Israel and Hamas have now both agreed to the ceasefire framework endorsed by the Council in resolution 2735 (2024). There are still gaps to be closed, and the Council must keep pressure on Hamas to accept the deal outlined in resolution 2735 (2024) and to begin implementing it, without delay and without conditions. That is what we all want here in the Council. It is what the Palestinians in Gaza want. But these negotiations are trending in the right direction, and we are working in close cooperation with Egypt and Qatar in order to get this deal done and bring an end to this war.

It is also vital that the United Nations and humanitarian agencies have the resources and support needed to surge additional aid, some 600 trucks' worth, every single day, into Gaza as soon as that deal takes effect. Until then, it remains the view of the United States that Israel must take additional immediate steps to eliminate barriers to the delivery of aid at scale.

We thank the countries of the region, including Egypt, Jordan and Cyprus, that have enabled aid delivery to Gaza through their territory, and we hope that all of them can do more to help meet the staggering need in this critical moment.

While we have seen progress addressing long-standing requests from the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, other requests, particularly those related to communications equipment vital for deconfliction processes, remain unresolved. We urge the Government of Israel to work with the United Nations to overcome these and other roadblocks.

Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza Kaag briefed us about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. Palestinian civilians are living in hell. Over and over, they have had to flee from one place to another in search of safety. As the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report made devastatingly clear, hundreds of thousands live in fear that they will not be able to find their next meal. And so many people have lost parents and siblings, children and friends, including in a recent Israel Defense Forces strike on a United Nations-supported school in Nuseirat camp.

Finalizing and implementing the ceasefire deal on the table is the best way to alleviate the suffering. We are also hopeful that a ceasefire in Gaza would assist diplomacy aimed at de-escalating the situation along the Blue Line, which is necessary in order to enable displaced people in Israel and Lebanon to return home. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is playing an invaluable role in that work. We support a straightforward extension of its mandate and are prepared to immediately begin work on a narrow resolution towards that end.

Hizbullah, of course, is not the only Iran-backed group in the region seeking to take advantage of the situation in Gaza in order to undermine regional peace and security. The Houthis continue to brazenly violate international law with their attacks on commercial and merchant vessels in the Red Sea that have affected us all. These attacks must cease, and Member States must stop arming and enabling the Houthis. We remain gravely concerned about the fate of personnel of the United Nations, the diplomatic and private sector and non-governmental organizations detained by the Houthis since early June. They must be released unharmed.

While the world's eyes may be on Gaza, Lebanon and the Red Sea, we cannot forget about the situation in the West Bank. We remain concerned about the significant uptick in deadly violence against Palestinian civilians by violent extremist settlers in the West Bank and condemn that activity in the strongest terms.

Just last week, we announced another round of designations, naming three Israeli individuals and five entities connected to acts of violence against civilians or instability in the West Bank. We urge the Government of Israel to take immediate steps to hold those individuals and other entities accountable.

We also reiterate our concern about Israel's recent announcement expanding settlements, declaring expansive State lands and legalizing outposts. Unilateral actions, like the Government of Israel's settlement programme, are inconsistent with international law and detrimental to a two-State solution.

We welcome reports that Israel will extend the correspondent banking relationship for four months and release a portion of the clearance revenues of the Palestinian Authority (PA). And we call on Israel to extend correspondent banking for at least 12 months, as well as release all of the withheld clearance revenues. The viability of the Palestinian Authority is essential to stability in the West Bank; steps that weaken it only undermine Israel's security.

Finally, we encourage Israel to join members of the Council in supporting the PA's reform programme.

In that same Nobel lecture that I mentioned earlier, Ralph Bunche admitted that "it is not easy to speak of peace with either conviction or reassurance." And yet to speak of peace, to work towards peace, is urgently needed. And it is the task before every one of us in the Council — not to point fingers and certainly not to seed divisions.

The United States therefore remains steadfast in our efforts to pressure Hamas to take the steps necessary to close gaps at the negotiating table and finalize the ceasefire deal endorsed by the Council; to bring the hostages home, including the eight Americans still held by Hamas for over 280 days; to support humanitarian access into and across the entire Gaza Strip and to meet the urgent protection needs of Gaza's most vulnerable; to promote regional security and continue to work towards a two-State solution, where Israelis and Palestinians alike can live in peace and in dignity; and

to commit to patient, persistent, undismayed effort so that peace can be won.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for organizing this open debate and express my appreciation to Chef de Cabinet Rattray for the Secretary-General's statement.

The silence has been deafening on a possible solution to end the war in Gaza. Guyana had hoped that with the adoption of resolution 2735 (2024) five weeks ago, supporting the efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar, that the bombs and bullets that continue to rain down on Gaza would have been silenced. We commend the United States, Egypt and Qatar for their continued efforts and must remain optimistic. We, however, recall that it is the responsibility of the Council to continue to do all in its power to bring an end to the war.

The multilayered catastrophe in Palestine worsens with each passing day. The dimensions of the catastrophe stretch across every facet of Palestinian life both in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Its principal characteristics are oppression and repression, indignity and impunity, destruction, deprivation and death. Yet, even in their seemingly unending suffering, Palestinians look to the United Nations to bring the catastrophe to an end. Guyana's appeal, therefore, is for a collective mustering of political will to advance the peace process and to give the Palestinian people real hope of a secure and stable future. That is the only prospect which can equally secure a stable future for Israel and the Middle East.

Nine months of Israel's barbaric war on Gaza has birthed a severely mutilated population, driven from corner to corner of the Strip while bombs incessantly rain down on their severely weakened bodies. The death toll is now nearing 40,000, with the majority being women and children. What really is life in the Gaza Strip? Bombs, starvation, inadequate health care and essential goods and services have seen the civilian population robbed of everything necessary for its survival. The continued impediments to the entry of humanitarian aid, in contravention of legally binding decisions of the Security Council, represent a complete disregard of international law obligations, particularly international humanitarian law. Guyana notes, for example, that though the Kerem Shalom/Karem Abu Salem crossing is open, only a trickle of aid has entered through that crossing because there is an active combat zone between the crossing and the place where

Palestinian civilians are residing. It is therefore nearly impossible to transport aid via that route owing to security concerns. We must also recall that the overall security situation in the Gaza Strip remains precarious owing to the indiscriminate bombardment and the general breakdown of law and order — a breakdown entirely attributable to the desperation engendered by the prevailing circumstances.

For months we have seen targeted attacks against key civilian infrastructure, including health-care facilities and schools. Refugee camps have not been spared. Indeed, attacks against camps have intensified. In recent weeks, Al-Mawasi, Bureij and Nuseirat have all been attacked. Yet we hear that a ceasefire agreement cannot be reached owing to red lines. What red lines are there that allow for the continuous killing of women and children and the bombing of schools, refugee camps and hospitals? Guyana condemns that wanton violence in the strongest terms and calls on Israel to adhere to its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We also demand that other States Members of the United Nations uphold their duty to ensure that those obligations are upheld. The Charter of the United Nations and international legal instruments are not an à la carte menu from which we choose at our convenience.

We are also seeing a ramping up of attacks against the United Nations both in rhetoric and in physical bombardments against United Nations staffers and facilities. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities are being destroyed by Israel. Seventy per cent of UNRWA's schools have been bombed. UNRWA's headquarters in Gaza has been decimated. Nearly 200 UNRWA staffers have been killed in the war. And the situation in the West Bank has also heated up considerably. That is an extremely dismal reality, and we must extinguish that inferno.

Guyana calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and urges the parties to prioritize the protection of civilians, as dictated by international law. We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and Palestinians detained without trial in Israeli prisons. We urge adherence to the various resolutions of the Security Council.

Guyana also calls for the scaling up of humanitarian assistance into Gaza. We stress in particular that the type of food assistance reaching the civilian population

must be of high nutritional value considering the dire State of food insecurity and nutrition. We underline the obligation of Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure that the population has access to humanitarian relief. We call on Israel to uphold that obligation and echo the demands of the International Court of Justice in that regard.

Guyana further calls for the protection of United Nations and humanitarian personnel. The attacks on UNRWA must stop immediately and functioning deconfliction and notification mechanisms must become operational.

We also call for actions to reduce the tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to reduce the heightened violence between Palestinians and Israelis. We further call for good-faith efforts aimed at reducing tensions in the region.

A hitherto impoverished Gaza has been set back by many more years. The Council cannot afford to slip into malaise on the Palestinian question but must continue to proactively work towards a permanent solution to the matter. The two-State solution remains the only viable option, and stringent efforts are needed, particularly by those with influence in the region, to move the needle on its implementation. Guyana is committed to doing its part to end what is perhaps the longest ongoing injustice against a people.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for presiding over today's meeting and Chef de Cabinet Rattray for delivering the statement on behalf of Secretary-General Guterres.

Since its outbreak more than nine months ago, the Gaza conflict has caused more than 38,000 civilian deaths, resulting in an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. The situation continues to deteriorate with millions of Gazans repeatedly being forced to move. Schools and refugee camps have been under constant bombardment. The red lines of international law and international humanitarian law have been breached time and again. The international community must pool all its efforts to promote a ceasefire in order to save lives and alleviate the ongoing disaster without delay.

An immediate and lasting ceasefire is a necessary precondition for saving innocent lives. When pushing for the adoption of resolution 2735 (2024) within the Council, the United States repeatedly claimed that

Israel had accepted the ceasefire agreement. However, more than a month has passed, and the Israeli military operations in Gaza have continued to expand with recent attacks on several refugee camps, including Al-Mawasi and Nuseirat, causing massive casualties. At this moment, what Gaza needs is hope for peace. Military operations will only cause more casualties among innocent civilians and will not create conditions conducive to the rescue of hostages. We urge Israel to immediately cease all military operations in Gaza and to stop the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. Countries with major influence should make earnest and responsible efforts to press the parties to come up with the political will to implement the relevant Council resolutions.

An expansion of humanitarian access is urgently needed to ease the current situation. The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is a man-made disaster. Hunger should not be weaponized, nor should humanitarian issues be politicized. The closure of the floating pier has once again made it clear that land transportation routes, for which there is no substitute, are the most effective means to expand humanitarian access at scale. Humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, have implemented what is the last lifeline for the people of Gaza.

We condemn the attacks on humanitarian agencies and their personnel and call for a thorough investigation of related incidents and accountability. China urges Israel to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law by lifting the blockade and opening all land crossings into Gaza so as to ensure the rapid, safe and large-scale entry of humanitarian supplies into Gaza and their safe and orderly distribution, while cooperating fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian actors.

The two-State solution is the only viable way to resolve the question of the Middle East. Over the past decades, the Palestinian-Israeli situation has been repeatedly mired in turmoil and tension. The root cause of it all is the fact that the two-State solution has not been implemented and the Palestinian people's national rights to independent statehood have not been realized — Gaza belongs to Palestine and the Palestinian people. Discussions on the post-war governance of Gaza must be based on reaching a political solution, rather than on engaging in piecemeal crisis management. It is vital to respect the will of the Palestinian people

and address the legitimate concerns of the countries of the region. China firmly supports the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, governed by Palestinians, and calls for the convening of a larger, more authoritative and more effective international peace conference and the establishment of a concrete timetable and road map for the implementation of the two-State solution.

The current conflict in Gaza is having a growing spillover effect. The situation in the Middle East is increasingly precarious and worrisome. China calls on all parties to exercise calm and restraint, refrain from actions that exacerbate tensions and work together to prevent a conflagration that could engulf the entire Middle Eastern region. Together with others, China will continue to work tirelessly to bring an early end to the fighting in Gaza, alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe and implement the two-State solution.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for delivering the Secretary-General's briefing.

Nine months since the 7 October 2023 attacks, at least 120 hostages, alive and dead, remain held in horrific conditions. Innocent Palestinians continue to suffer and die in Gaza. A devastating humanitarian crisis is worsening by the day. There is an imminent risk of famine. And we are deeply concerned about the risk of regional escalation, in particular along the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon.

In one of his first acts as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Sir Keir Starmer set out the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages and an immediate surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We strongly support the ongoing efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States to that end. The deal on the table, endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2735 (2024), is the best chance to support that. We urge both sides to show flexibility in negotiations and demonstrate a clear and firm commitment to ensure implementation of the deal.

First, we are calling on Israel to protect civilians, to allow unfettered aid into Gaza and to ensure the United Nations and humanitarian actors have the access and equipment necessary to safely get aid to those who need it most. We reaffirm our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the vital role it plays in saving lives in Gaza as well as providing basic services

and promoting stability in the West Bank and the wider region — a fundamental building block for lasting peace. It is essential that UNRWA be able to operate on a sustainable financial basis and be able to deliver on its mandate.

Secondly, we express our serious concern at the escalating violence perpetrated by settlers in the West Bank. We condemn the recent Israeli expansion of settlements. We reject decisions by the Government of Israel to declare 2,357 hectares of land in the West Bank as State lands thus far this year — the largest of such declarations of State lands since the Oslo Accords. Such acts are not only illegal under international law but also undermine prospects for a two-State solution. We demand a halt to those illegal activities.

Thirdly, there is no military solution to the conflict. Pursuing military options will only deepen divisions and perpetuate the suffering of Palestinians and Israelis. The civilian death toll in Gaza is unacceptable. Reports of civilian casualties following Israeli strikes near schools and designated humanitarian zones in Gaza in recent weeks were appalling — as the Foreign Secretary said, urgent measures are needed to protect civilians.

We are appalled by the impact of the conflict on women and children. The United Nations estimates that there are more than 17,000 unaccompanied children in Gaza, and more than 5,000 women have been confirmed as killed, with many more unidentified or missing. Many of those killed and missing are mothers. Children are especially vulnerable to being killed, maimed and separated from their family, and suffering trauma, acute malnutrition, violence and exploitation. Women and girls in Gaza face a desperate struggle to access food and ensure basic hygiene, health and dignity in the face of unfathomable sanitary conditions, rape and conflict-related sexual violence.

Peace will be sustainable only if both Israelis and Palestinians recommit to a renewed peace process resulting in a two-State solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State — the undeniable right of the Palestinian people. The visit by the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom to the region this week signifies our unwavering commitment to that end. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has spoken with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Abbas and other leaders in the region, underscoring the United Kingdom's commitment to play its full diplomatic role in securing

a ceasefire deal and creating the space for a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-State solution. The world needs a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for his briefing on behalf of the Secretary-General.

For more than nine months, civilians in Palestine and Israel have experienced enormous suffering. That catastrophe must come to an end now. As resolution 2735 (2024) demands, Hamas must accept the deal without further delay or more conditions, and both parties must faithfully implement it.

A series of dismaying incidents have been repeatedly occurring, including an Israeli strike on a so-called safe zone in Al-Mawasi, which reportedly killed more than 90 Palestinians. Those recent attacks demonstrate, once again, that nowhere in Gaza is safe. We urge Israel to cease all attacks that lead to civilian casualties. When civilians are routinely killed and civilian infrastructure is routinely targeted, Israel is not doing what it describes as everything to protect civilians.

As repeatedly stressed by all members of the Security Council, Israel must abide by its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. Israel must implement measures to abide by the rules of distinction, precaution and proportionality. Under no circumstances must hospitals, schools, places of worship and humanitarian facilities be targeted. That is all the more important as such facilities are being used as shelters for innocent and helpless civilians, many of whom have been forcibly displaced multiple times as a result of Israel's recurrent evacuation orders. At the same time, Hamas must also cease endangering Palestinian and Israeli civilians through its use of densely populated areas in Gaza as bases for launching rockets that target Israel.

Humanitarian aid must not be hindered as famine spreads. Despite the operationalization of the mechanism established pursuant to resolution 2720 (2023), enhancing the management of humanitarian aid to Gaza, the delivery of aid inside the Strip is nearly impossible, and this is largely attributable to Israel's negligence in ensuring that law and order are maintained in Gaza. Israel should open all available land crossings, exert every effort to maintain public order in Gaza and protect humanitarian aid workers.

We are also deeply alarmed by the ongoing deterioration of the situation in the West Bank. Since its adoption in 2016, resolution 2334 (2016) has not been implemented, as Israel has expanded settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It is particularly alarming that, thus far this year, Israel has seized more land in the West Bank than in the past 20 years combined, reflecting a trend of accelerating settlement expansion. Military operations by Israeli forces in the West Bank, the worsening settler violence and the demolition of Palestinian homes are increasingly troubling, as they are carried out with near impunity. Inflammatory rhetoric and actions by high-level Israeli officials are adding fuel to the fire. We strongly urge Israel to stop all settlement activity, respect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and hold perpetrators accountable.

The entire Middle East is on the precipice of even more dangerous hostilities. The situation across the Blue Line is of utmost concern, with daily exchanges of fire between Israel and Hizbullah increasing in scope and intensity, in total disregard of resolution 1701 (2006). Hizbullah's armed presence in southern Lebanon is an ongoing violation of that resolution and Israel's traumatic experience of 7 October 2023 may have enhanced the hard-line approach taken by the Israel Defense Forces across the Blue Line.

That, in turn, is further worsening the political and economic crisis in Lebanon, where 5 million Lebanese share their small land with approximately 2 million refugees, including 1.5 million Syrians. The recent worsening of public sentiment in Lebanon due to the large number of Syrian refugees is another concerning factor that exacerbates regional instability. Continuous exchanges of fire across the Blue Line, amid repeated warnings against a full-fledged war between Lebanon and Israel, are also threatening the safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, including the Republic of Korea's peacekeeping personnel.

In addition, ongoing attacks against vessels by the Houthis in the Red Sea and repeated attacks between Israel and Syria also illustrate the dangerous escalation in the region. The entire world should exert the utmost effort to avert a full-scale regional war. We call for maximum restraint by all parties in the region, both national and non-State actors.

**Mr. Gaouaoui** (Algeria): At the outset, I would like to thank the Russian Federation for organizing this

meeting. I also extend our gratitude to Mr. Courtenay Rattray for his insightful briefing.

For more than nine months, the Israeli occupation's aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people has persisted, resulting in a devastating toll of casualties. Approximately 130,000 Palestinians have been martyred or wounded. The international community appears powerless to stop the relentless killing machine that targets innocent people in the streets of Gaza. The suffering of the people of Gaza worsens daily.

The Israeli occupying forces displace Palestinians from their homes, destroy their communities and inflict death with impunity. We call for accountability. It is not an option, it is a must, and it matters. Unfortunately, the international community has yet to implement effective measures to stop those atrocities. This weekend's attacks on displaced people in Al-Mawasi and Al-Shati — safe zones that became death zones — along with the continued deliberate targeting of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools are clear evidence that Israeli occupation forces blatantly disregard the sanctity of human life.

The international community seems paralysed, held hostage by war criminals in the Israeli occupation Government. Those people thrive on Palestinian suffering and violate international law and humanitarian norms, using aid as a tool for pressure and bargaining. Palestinians now face famine, as confirmed by United Nations reports. That is a war crime. The Security Council must take the necessary steps, as outlined in resolution 2417 (2018). The Israeli occupation's violation of international law cannot be addressed with mere statements. It requires decisive sanctions to hold the occupation authorities accountable.

The provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice were clear: the occupation authorities must immediately provide essential services and humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza. Instead, the occupation authorities have responded with more obstacles, targeting aid trucks and preventing UNRWA from carrying out its vital work. The Rafah crossing, which, per the Court's order, must remain open, has been completely destroyed by the occupiers.

The ongoing policy of ethnic cleansing and collective punishment against Palestinians mocks the Security Council's inability to enforce its resolutions. Those resolutions remain words on paper, raising

a crucial question: does international law apply selectively? The Israeli occupation acts with impunity, as if above the law.

The time for unity is now. Let us put aside differences and work towards an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and a lasting, just solution for Palestine. That solution must be based on international consensus, upholding the Palestinians' right to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on their ancestral land — a fate that they must decide for themselves.

To conclude, as affirmed by the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algeria, which paid a high price to restore its sovereignty and independence, will remain steadfast in supporting the Palestinian people until they obtain their full rights. The horrific images of killing and destruction that we see today in the occupied territories must mark the last chapter of Palestinian suffering. The lives lost and the blood shed must pave the way for an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): I thank the Russian Federation's presidency of the Security Council for convening this high-level open debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing, read out by the Chef de Cabinet, Mr. Courtenay Rattray.

It has been 283 days since the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on Israeli civilians and the subsequent response by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) with bombardment and ground operations in the Gaza Strip. Approximately 1,200 people died on the 7 October 2023 attacks, approximately 8,730 people were wounded, and 240 people, most of them Israelis, were taken as hostages. Approximately 120 are still being held as hostages.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict reported that, based on the information gathered by her Office's mission team from multiple and independent sources, there are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred during the 7 October 2023 attacks in multiple locations around the Gaza periphery.

The narration of the facts surrounding the 7 October 2023 attacks is followed by even more brutal human tragedy. Lest we forget, go quiet or grow numb, the number of Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip since

the IDF ground operations and bombardments began is more than 38,000, of which more than 15,000 are children. More than 89,000 Palestinians have been injured, and 10,000 have gone missing. In an area of 141 square miles, there are 1.9 million internally displaced persons, with an estimated 9 out of 10 people having been internally displaced multiple times.

As of 14 July, 197 staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been killed, along with approximately 274 humanitarian aid workers and 500 health-care workers. There have been 458 incidents reported on UNRWA premises, and 189 UNRWA installations have been damaged. Full and unhindered access to humanitarian aid remains a challenge, owing to denials and delays by the IDF in coordinating movement and criminal gang attacks on humanitarian convoys. The Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom crossing, which has been designated as the primary crossing for humanitarian cargo, is not fully operational owing to active fighting and insecurity around the crossing, with a breakdown of public order due to the absence of law enforcement personnel.

An estimated 30,000 pregnant women are facing acute levels of hunger, more than 10,000 are on the verge of famine and almost 7,000 are in famine conditions. There exist major concerns regarding waste management, sewage control and the high risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases. The situation of women and children is characterized by a lack of privacy and dignity, the increase in sexual-based violence and domestic abuse and shortages of food, water and sanitary essentials. With the collective punishment, bombardment and acute levels of hunger, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been robbed of their inherent human dignity.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has been top of the Council's agenda for months, with a focus on ending the conflict in Gaza. The actions of the Security Council to adopt resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024) followed or were concurrent to, respectively, the Secretary-General's invocation of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations; the General Assembly's adoption of resolutions, including resolution ES-10/22, which called for an immediate ceasefire, immediate and unconditional hostage release, humanitarian access and compliance by all parties with their obligations under international law; and the International Court of

Justice's ordering of provisional measures in the case *South Africa v. Israel*.

Despite all the actions mentioned, nine months on, the narratives from the Gaza Strip remain horrendous. We have witnessed the refusal by the parties to the conflict to implement the Council's resolutions and the binding orders of the International Court of Justice and to comply with their obligations under international law. Sierra Leone joined the other Council members that voted in favour of resolution 2735 (2024) in good faith, on the assurance that a deal had been reached or was imminent. Since the adoption of resolution 2735 (2024) on 10 June 2024, approximately 1,300 more Palestinians have been killed, with civilians and protected objects, in particular schools, directly targeted in missile strikes. The massive destruction of physical and critical infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip, including water, sanitation and energy facilities, roads, bridges, hospitals, schools and residential homes, means that even after a ceasefire is achieved, the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza will be a prolonged endeavour. That will pose an additional challenge for the Palestinian authorities and the international community in restoring law and order and strengthening good governance.

There are — and there will be — no winners in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The continuation of the war in the Gaza Strip runs the risk of breeding a generation that is traumatized, uneducated, maimed, orphaned, homeless and more dangerously, aggrieved. There is also a generation that has been scarred by the unimaginable horrors of 7 October 2023 and overwhelmed with nightmares of the tunnels of Hamas. Changing that narrative requires us to take collective and immediate action to secure lasting peace, but also to end impunity and ensure accountability for the atrocity crimes being committed in the conflict.

Increased settler activity and violence, military raids and detentions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, heightened tensions between Israel and Lebanon across the Blue Line and reported incidents in the Red Sea linked to the situation in Gaza further risk a regional spillover, with dire implications for global peace and security.

In proffering a way forward to improve the current situation, we would like to make three points.

First, Sierra Leone reiterates the demand for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip

and the entire occupied Palestinian territory, a legitimate call that has been echoed by the Council repeatedly. A ceasefire at this point will greatly improve the security situation in the Gaza Strip, curtail lawlessness and social disorder, guarantee the protection of civilians and facilitate the unhindered passage of humanitarian relief to the millions of people in urgent need.

Secondly, as emphasized in resolution 2573 (2021), we underline the primary responsibility of the parties to the conflict to protect civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian personnel and civilians engaged in duties related to the operation, maintenance or repair of civilian infrastructure critical to the delivery of essential services to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

We therefore condemn the recent attacks on UNRWA's headquarters and schools housing displaced civilians from Khan Younis and elsewhere, and the attack on Al-Mawasi refugee camp, where it was reported that 90 Palestinians were killed, fatefully in a place considered to be a safe zone.

Additionally, for accelerated and safe delivery of humanitarian relief to Gaza via all possible routes, we support calls for the establishment of effective, credible and predictable deconfliction and coordination systems across Gaza.

Third and lastly, addressing the fundamental issues fuelling this conflict requires political will and commitment from Israel and Palestine to meaningfully engage in dialogue and negotiations towards a peaceful settlement to the dispute. While the political horizon of a two-State solution is the ultimate end, we continue to urge the parties, as an immediate solution, to maintain good faith and a positive attitude throughout the current negotiations brokered by the Egypt, Qatar and the United States in order to ensure that an agreement is reached in the shortest possible time.

The fighting has been long. The suffering of the people has been long. The recovery, reconstruction and restoration of human dignity to the victims may take long. But it is time to give peace a chance, which must be persistently pursued.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I also want to thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for delivering, as always, a very clear message from the Secretary-General.

In his December letter invoking Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations (S/2023/962), the

Secretary-General underlined that the hostilities had caused appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. He urged the Council to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. It is not that we have not tried. We adopted four resolutions (resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024)), none of them was adopted unanimously, and none of them changed the situation on the ground.

I am certain that a deep reflection on the role of the Council in this crisis is taking place among its members. Undoubtedly, several of us are reflecting on the disregard of international law, blatant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. One of the many ways we have been deceived is through assurances, in recent months, of so-called safe zones. Instead of a humanitarian tool that provided minimum protection standards, safe zones became recurring targets.

We repeat what we said a few weeks ago (see S/PV.9678): neither Hamas nor Israel cares about civilians. Hamas is hiding among the internally displaced persons and thus endangering the lives of their fellow Palestinians. While on the other side, Israel is showing complete disregard for the suffering of civilians in pursuit of Hamas. There is no moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel. However, the conduct of both actors against civilians is deplorable and constitutes a crime.

While we are still struggling to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian catastrophe, we need to pave the way for the restoration of the political horizon towards the two-State solution. We need to prevent future humanitarian catastrophes. There is a Gaza beyond a ceasefire. So, let me offer some reflection on what the Council's steps could be in that regard.

Our first step includes an immediate ceasefire. All relevant Security Council resolutions and International Court of Justice orders on provisional measures must be fully implemented. They are all binding and have clear demands for action, including the release of hostages and aid delivery at scale. That will ensure the beginning of the end of colossal human suffering. We continue to offer full support, and we commend the mediators — Egypt, Qatar and the United States — for their efforts.

Our second step could be a renewed political process leading to the two-State solution. Despite the

absence of it — or perhaps because of it — the Council must reflect on the structure of the political process. Only a coherent approach backed by strong political will can provide a clear path forward. An international peace conference under the United Nations auspices would provide a platform for a revitalized exchange that would lead to a clear blueprint for the Middle East peace process. This step is not only in the hands of the Security Council or the broader international community. Upholding the Charter is a responsibility of every United Nations Member State. The appalling situation in Gaza is overshadowing the one in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where we follow heightened tensions, coupled with a rising death toll, a surge of settler attacks and a dramatic settlement policy drive. In the light of steps contradicting the two-State solution, we all need to take steps in its defence — collectively and individually.

Our third step is rebuilding — as in the reconstruction of Gaza, as in returning structure and public order to Gaza, as in supporting the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. For that to happen, we need a strong Palestinian Authority that is able to carry out its internal reform processes and able to access its tax revenues and bank accounts. And we need the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to support the transition period.

The Council has to focus on the interest of those who matter the most and pay the highest price: people on the ground, civilians. There is no viable alternative to the renewed political process and the prevention of a regional spiral of violence. With that in mind, we also call on all parties to show restraint along the Blue Line and to commit to full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Parties must use the liaison and coordination mechanisms of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, leverage the good offices of international actors and fully commit to de-escalate.

**Mr. Yamazaki (Japan):** I thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for his briefing.

More than nine months have passed since the outbreak of the devastating conflict in the Gaza Strip following the brutal acts of terror by Hamas and other militant groups. Japan deeply regrets the heavy civilian casualties and destruction caused by the ongoing hostilities.

We are appalled that on Saturday, air strikes conducted by the Israel Defense Forces on a so-called

safe-zone in Al-Mawasi reportedly killed at least 90 people, and that the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in Gaza was destroyed the following day. Let me reiterate that all United Nations facilities, including UNRWA premises, must be protected at all times. These are just two notable examples of the many horrors happening regularly on the ground.

All parties must strictly abide by the principles of international law, especially the protection of civilians. Hamas must stop using civilians as human shields. We also have grave concerns about the nearly 2 million internally displaced Palestinians, many having been displaced multiple times, with little or no access to food, clean water, medicine and other basic human needs. In that vein, it is alarming to see yet another evacuation order by Israel for Khan Younis and Gaza City. There are no safe places in Gaza. The killed, maimed, displaced and struggling people are all human beings, not just numbers. Each of them has a life, a family, dreams and dignity.

Japan takes note of Israel's claim that it has made some progress on reducing civilian casualties and facilitating humanitarian assistance to Gaza and acknowledges Israel's cooperation with Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator Sigrid Kaag and other humanitarian agencies. But more must be done. Effective deconfliction mechanisms, reopening the Rafah crossing, full use of Ashdod port and guaranteeing access and safety for United Nations and other humanitarian workers are all vital to accelerate necessary aid into and across Gaza.

The reality is that the breakdown of order is making all aid operations extremely difficult or nearly impossible. Last month, the Security Council adopted resolution 2735 (2024) endorsing the three-phase proposal which would pave the way for the release of hostages and a sustainable ceasefire.

Japan strongly supports the critical and tireless mediation of the United States, Egypt and Qatar and is encouraged to see a renewed diplomatic push towards an agreement. We sincerely hope that both parties seize the precious momentum and reach a much-needed deal without further delay.

Beyond Gaza, Japan condemns the recent decisions by the Government of Israel regarding settlement expansion in the West Bank, as well as the rise in

extremist settler violence. We call on Israel to reverse its decisions and prevent further violence immediately. In addition, while Japan takes note of the most recent transfers of parts of clearance revenues by Israel to the Palestinian Authority, it urges Israel to release all withheld revenues and take necessary measures to maintain economic stability in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, the escalation of hostilities along the Blue Line is also a matter of serious concern. Japan calls on both parties to exercise full restraint and cease hostilities, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, only a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, will finally resolve the decades-long conflict. Japan remains steadfastly committed to achieving that goal.

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): Mozambique commends the Russian Federation presidency for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question, as a signature event of its presidency of the Security Council. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing to the Council on the subject, delivered to us by the Chef de Cabinet, Mr. Courtenay Rattray.

Reports on recent events in the Middle East deepen our concerns about the aggravation of the already dramatic situation in Gaza and the region. The repeated attacks into Gaza by the Israeli armed forces in which civilians, medical personnel, humanitarian workers and journalists have been killed deserve the Council's strong condemnation.

We strongly believe the war must end now. It is time to bring it to a halt. To that end, we reiterate our call on the parties to effectively implement resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024), 2724 (2024) and 2735 (2024) without further delay. Urgent action must be taken for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, for the release of all hostages and for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of Palestinians in need.

We are concerned about the reports of constant evacuation orders for the population in Gaza. That gravely contravenes international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We are concerned that, besides the Council's redoubled efforts, the situation on the ground is not improving. Attacks continue to cause civilian deaths,

forced displacement and the aggravation of the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians.

Mozambique welcomes the diplomatic efforts by the United States, Arab countries and the international community at large in the search of solutions to the protracted conflict in the Gaza Strip and in Palestine.

We call on Israel to comply with all Security Council resolutions and the International Court of Justice orders on the matter.

We express our full support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as it remains a pillar in assisting millions of Palestinian refugees. We call on all donors to provide the Agency with the necessary and predictable financial resources to operate and fulfil its mandate.

Mozambique remains firm in its position of recognition of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, political independence and sovereignty, anchored in the Charter of the United Nations and in the principles and norms of international law. We reiterate the need for the implementation of a two-State solution — a solution of two independent and sovereign States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, both as members of the United Nations.

**Mrs. Frazier** (Malta): I thank Chef de Cabinet Rattray for delivering the Secretary-General's briefing.

The Middle East is going through an unprecedented period. As the war in Gaza rages on, it is having a ripple effect across the entire region, endangering civilians and upending any prospects for peace. That is why, following the horrific 7 October attacks by Hamas and other armed groups, Malta has unfailingly called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. We continue to unequivocally condemn those heinous terror attacks and to call for the urgent and unconditional release of all remaining hostages in Gaza.

It is imperative that Hamas and Israel accept and implement the ceasefire proposal outlined in resolution 2735 (2024). The implementation of all relevant Council resolutions and the full, immediate and effective implementation of the orders of the International Court of Justice remain essential.

Despite those clear obligations, we continue to witness further suffering in Gaza and beyond. Just last week, Israel ordered the forced displacement

of all Palestinians from Gaza City. The recurring displacement of the population exacerbates the peril already faced by Palestinians. It also forces them into smaller areas, where their safety, even in supposedly designated humanitarian zones, cannot be guaranteed.

Malta is gravely alarmed at the effect the war is having on women. Harrowing accounts from the ground clearly show that we must do a lot more to ensure their dignity, privacy and safety.

Children are also suffering in a disproportionate manner. Israel's bombing of schools and hospitals, in which those most vulnerable seek refuge and treatment, is unconscionable. Strikes on facilities sheltering internally displaced persons have led to the killing of children. That is unacceptable. Children must never be considered as justifiable collateral damage. Young children and pregnant women are at additional acute risk of disease and malnourishment owing to a decimated health-care system, persistent food insecurity and no access to clean water. Those conditions put children, newborns and pregnant women in significant peril and are not in line with their unique protections under international law.

All parties have an obligation under international law, including international humanitarian law, to protect civilians. Accountability for violations of those obligations must be ensured. Furthermore, we reiterate that humanitarian access into and across the Gaza Strip must be drastically improved. Land crossings must be re-opened and fully utilized. An effective and respected deconfliction system remains a priority.

Let us never forget that humanitarians risk their lives on a daily basis and must be protected at all times. It is the duty of the Council to ensure that they are provided with the tools and protection they need to at least mitigate the extreme risks they face.

We commend the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other humanitarian actors, which continue to provide support at all costs. UNRWA has a vital role to play in the humanitarian response in Gaza and the West Bank and in regional stability. In the face of threats to its facilities and mandate, financial and political support to the Agency is vital.

Preventing a spillover of escalation in the Middle East is paramount. That is crucial in the face of increasingly alarming skirmishes between Israel and

Hizbullah across the Blue Line. De-escalation, restraint and diplomacy are key.

Israel's illegal unilateral actions in the West Bank, including the recent announcement of further settlements, and the continued dispossession and violence imposed on Palestinians also need to cease. Those actions exacerbate tensions and threaten the viability of a two-State solution. Military raids in West Bank refugee camps, along with a surge in extremist settler violence, further impede progress towards peace.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority must enjoy the full support of the international community on its path towards revitalization for effective governance over a unified West Bank and Gaza as an independent Palestinian State. It also has a crucial role to play in recovery and reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

Challenges towards ensuring peace for Israelis and Palestinians persist, but we must not let that extinguish all hope. A ceasefire in Gaza is the first step towards paving the way for a credible political horizon. Malta affirms that that must be then followed by irreversible actions towards the comprehensive realization of a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, while 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 all relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Chef de Cabinet, Mr. Courtenay Rattray, for the briefing presented this morning on behalf of the Secretary-General and, once again, to express my country's support for his work. I also welcome the presence of ministers and high-level representatives participating in this open debate today.

More than nine months have now passed since the terrorist acts of 7 October 2023. Violence and destruction have been a daily occurrence since then. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains critical despite the efforts made. A few days ago, last weekend, there was further shelling inside a designated safe area, in Al-Mawasi, leading to dozens of casualties and many wounded. It is worth recalling the obligation of all parties to respect the principles of international humanitarian law, including proportionality and distinction, and to make every effort to protect the civilian population.

In early June, the Council adopted resolution 2735 (2024), endorsing a ceasefire proposal that is still under negotiation, despite the call for the parties to accept and implement it without delay and without conditions. If an agreement had been reached by now, hostilities would have stopped, hostages would have been released, humanitarian aid could have arrived in a safe, sufficient and timely manner and we would not be mourning more casualties. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to reach such an agreement and — at this meeting — I must insist on messages that are as familiar as they are necessary.

I therefore reiterate Ecuador's condemnation of the acts of terror perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October, the acts of violence against civilians and the violations of international humanitarian law. I also repeat, hopefully for the last time, the demand for an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional and immediate release of all hostages. I also reiterate my support for efforts to reach an agreement, and I thank the United States, Qatar and Egypt for their willingness and perseverance. I urge the parties to also demonstrate their willingness and flexibility to finally stop the violence and start on the path to peaceful coexistence.

That path to peaceful coexistence is threatened not only by the war in Gaza but also by acts and decisions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution, such as the legitimization of settlements in the West Bank or the obstruction of the financing and functioning of the Palestinian Authority. It is therefore necessary to reiterate once again the call to respect and fully implement resolution 2334 (2016) and all Council resolutions. If the parties, instead of demonstrating restraint and good faith, choose to exacerbate the conflict and undermine paths to a peaceful solution, they will only perpetuate mutual mistrust and increase insecurity.

I conclude with another oft-repeated but equally necessary message — a message of support for a peaceful, negotiated, definitive 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 — a message of support for those who believe in a peaceful future.

**Mr. De Rivi re** (France) (*spoke in French*): The most recent developments in the Near and Middle East remind us of the urgent need to halt the current escalation. In Gaza, as French President Emmanuel

Macron has said, there is an urgent need to reach an agreement on a ceasefire that guarantees the protection of all civilians, unhindered humanitarian access and the release of all hostages. The resolutions adopted by the Council must finally be implemented. France reiterates its solidarity with the Israeli people following the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 and its commitment to Israel's security.

France expresses its outrage following the Israeli strikes that targeted a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Al-Mawasi camp for displaced persons on 14 and 15 July. We continue to call on Israel to do its utmost to protect civilians in conducting military operations and to respect international law, in particular the principles of proportionality and distinction.

Settlement activity, which violates international law, and the cycle of violence in the West Bank must end. Settlers who commit attacks against the Palestinian population must be held accountable. France condemns the recent decisions by Israel on settlement activity, in particular the recognition of five new settlements and the building of more than 5,000 additional housing units.

The pursuit of a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-State solution is a matter of urgency. We are resolved to play our full part in efforts to that end.

France is also gravely concerned at the continuation of clashes along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel. We call on all parties to exercise restraint in order to avert a regional conflagration, the consequences of which would be catastrophic. The Council should be able to unanimously call for de-escalation. France also recalls that the clashes represent a threat to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, and its capacity to act and to provide security must be maintained. We reiterate our commitment to the security of Lebanon, Israel and the region, the sovereignty of Lebanon and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We will pursue our efforts to promote a diplomatic solution.

In Yemen, the Houthis must end their attacks in the Red Sea, which are a violation of international law, and engage in good faith in the peace process, under the auspices of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen. We urge Iran, which funds and arms the Houthis, to cease its destabilizing actions. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of United

Nations and non-governmental organization staff who are being held by the Houthis.

In Syria, only a political solution on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) will be capable of bringing peace, amid mounting tensions throughout Syria, the resurgence of Da'esh, the growth in Captagon trafficking and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Against the backdrop of rising tensions in the Middle East, France is engaging for a rapid de-escalation alongside our regional and international partners.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Bagheri** (Islamic Republic of Iran) (*spoke in Farsi; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like to thank the Russian Federation for organizing this timely open debate.

Over the past 285 days, the Israeli occupying regime has been committing extensive international crimes in Gaza. The regime, through a campaign of brutality and terror, continues to massacre innocent people, mostly women and children. In that deadly campaign, approximately 20 people are killed or injured every hour. The Israeli regime has destroyed more than 80 per cent of residential areas and all infrastructure, including hospitals, mosques, churches and educational centres, and historical sites in Gaza. The regime has brutally weaponized starvation as a means of war by blocking aid routes. The bombings of the refugee camps in Rafah and the attacks on displaced people in Khan Yunis are just two examples of those recent inhumane crimes.

Despite the global condemnation of the genocide and war crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza and the unanimous and united call of the international community for an immediate end to the genocide and massacre of Gaza's people, an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid — as reflected in four Security Council resolutions and numerous statements by international organizations, three provisional measures by the International Court of Justice and widespread protests — the Zionist occupying regime is continuing its brutal crimes against Palestine with full impunity.

Recently, the warmongering leaders of the regime have been under the illusion that expanding the war to Lebanon can save them from the quagmire of Gaza. That is an absurd and dangerous miscalculation

and exacerbates the already chaotic situation in that sensitive region, which could spiral out of control. In this Chamber, I would like to issue a strong warning against any venture by the rogue regime and its consequences. Undoubtedly, any aggression against Lebanon — an independent State Member of the United Nations — by the Zionist regime will, to its disappointment, be met with a decisive response from the international community, the nations in the region and the resistance groups. It is evident that the responsibility of the United States, as the strategic ally and main supporter of the regime in the region, cannot be denied in the case of any potential aggression by the regime against Lebanon.

The recent support from countries of the region to the Palestinian resistance stems from the inhumane crimes of the Israeli regime in Gaza, which have been ongoing since 1948. More than nine months of massive attacks by the Israeli regime on Gaza and the West Bank have proved that the destruction of the Palestinian resistance and Hamas, as a liberation movement established against occupation and aggression, is nothing more than an illusion. The support of all nations of the region and freedom seekers of the world to the praiseworthy resistance of the Palestinian nation has also proved that this nation is not at all alone in realizing its inherent right.

Israel is not a legitimate State. It is only an occupying regime, and the passage of time does not, and will not, lend it legitimacy because, according to well-known principles of international law, the occupation of a land or territory is temporary, even if it lasts for decades.

The only way to restore peace is to put an immediate, complete and permanent end to the occupation, aggression and crimes committed by the regime. The Security Council has the responsibility to achieve this goal, and, regrettably, the Security Council's inaction and lack of ability for almost 80 years now has emboldened the Israeli regime to commit more crimes against the oppressed people of Palestine.

We issue a strong call for a rectification of those historical failures and fulfilment of the Council's legal, political and human duty, especially by its permanent members. In that context, the United States bears an even greater responsibility. That country, with its approximately 50 vetoes and extensive support to the Israeli regime, has not only played a role in this major failure by the Council but has also been a primary

accomplice in the crimes and aggression committed by that notorious and criminal regime through comprehensive financial, military and intelligence support. Therefore, the claims of the United States to be promoting peace and stability in the region and its mediating efforts to establish a ceasefire are hypocritical.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reiterates its call for decisive action by the Security Council. We urge the Council to take the necessary measures on the basis of its duties under the Charter of the United Nations, including the adoption of a comprehensive and legally binding resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter to compel the Israeli regime to immediately and unconditionally end the genocide and aggression against Gaza, implement a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and open border crossings for the rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid.

The Security Council must also compel the Israeli regime to immediately, fully and unconditionally withdraw its military and security forces from Gaza, lift the siege of Gaza, stop the forced displacement of people, halt illegal settlement activities and provide full and immediate compensation for all damage inflicted on, inter alia, the people, infrastructure and residential areas in Gaza and other Palestinian territories to facilitate the rapid reconstruction of Gaza.

The regime must also withdraw from all occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories and refrain from any military attacks on Lebanon or other countries in the region. Furthermore, the international community and competent international organizations must ensure that all the commanders, perpetrators and supporters of Israel's crimes in Gaza and other Palestinian territories are prosecuted and punished.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been a positive element in regional developments, stabilizing sustainable peace and security, including in the fight against terrorism. In contrast, the Israeli regime has been the main source of regional insecurity, and the malicious activities of that regime have always posed a serious threat to regional and global peace and security. The nature and essence of the occupying Israeli regime are based on aggression, occupation, terror and genocide. The regime and its notorious Prime Minister, for whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) has requested an arrest warrant on charges of war crimes, have always attempted to accuse others by resorting to

a campaign of lies and misinformation. The Security Council must hold the rogue and rebellious Israeli regime accountable and put an end to the roots of war and genocide in Gaza and insecurity in the region.

In conclusion, I reaffirm the inalienable right of the nations of the region, including the Palestinian people, to defend and resist occupation and aggression. The Islamic Republic of Iran maintains that a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian question will only be possible through ending the occupation of all Palestinian territories, allowing the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination through the holding of a referendum among all the original inhabitants of Palestine and establishing an independent and unified State of Palestine. This is the only viable way to establish durable peace and security in the West Asia region.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain.

**Mr. Al Zayani** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for devoting this meeting to discussing the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to speak before the Security Council on behalf of my country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is presiding over the current session of the League of Arab States.

Over recent decades, the Middle East region has suffered from destructive wars and bitter conflicts and disputes, which have caused great loss of lives and damage to property and infrastructure, leaving behind painful humanitarian tragedies and violating international laws and conventions. They have become a major threat to regional security and stability and portend serious risks to international peace and security. It is incumbent upon the international community and the Security Council in particular to intensify efforts to arrive at sustainable solutions to all protracted conflicts and disputes in the region, and to work on establishing a just and lasting peace that preserves the rights of all peoples to life, freedom, dignity and coexistence in a climate of tolerance and human coexistence.

Despite the commendable efforts made by the international community to achieve peace in the Middle East, including through resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly, the Madrid Peace Conference, the Oslo Accords, the Camp David summit and the Arab Peace Initiative, peace and stability in

the region have unfortunately not been achieved, and the peoples of the region continued to suffer greatly from bloodshed, displacement and from being deprived of the necessities of life. The hope for a better future is fading.

The painful tragedy experienced by Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip over the past nine months is immense and intolerable, not only because of the lives lost, but also as a result of their deprivation of food, water, medicine, health care, education and the most basic services. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a moral stain on the entire world, and it must end. That must occur in a way that provides immediate assistance to civilians in Gaza and ensures the release of hostages and detainees, leading to lasting peace and security in the region.

As the war on the Gaza Strip continues, the entire Middle East region today stands at the crossroads. One path leads to a deepening and expansion of the conflict across the region. It is a path that draws some State and non-State actors into an open-ended and multifaceted conflict that will only bring about more destruction, misery and wasted potential. The other path is one that calls for a desired solution that does not simply lead to an immediate ceasefire, the provision of humanitarian assistance and the release of hostages and detainees, but that is a comprehensive, sustainable solution that takes into consideration other essential matters such as reconstruction, administrative governance and security arrangements after the ceasefire. That should take place within the context of efforts made to reach a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a solution that would naturally deliver peace, security and stability for all the countries and peoples of the Middle East.

The thirty-third Summit of the League of Arab States, which was held in the Kingdom of Bahrain in May under the presidency of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, reaffirmed the steadfast Arab position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and proved beyond any doubt that Arab States have collectively adopted the second path, the path of a just and lasting peace, as an irreplaceable strategic option if we want our human will to prevail in the battle for peace.

In its capacity as the current President of the thirty-third Summit of the League of Arab States, the Kingdom of Bahrain is participating in today's meeting

of the Council to reaffirm the full solidarity of the Arab States and their unwavering commitment to peace. The Bahrain declaration adopted by the Summit affirmed the unified Arab position and called for a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, and for irreversible steps to be taken to implement the two-State solution, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, and to guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent, sovereign and viable national State.

The Bahrain Summit represented a message of peace and solidarity to the entire world. It adopted a number of important initiatives, most notably the call for the convening of an international conference for peace in the Middle East to resolve the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-State solution. The Kingdom of Bahrain expressed its readiness to host such a conference, in addition to supporting the full recognition of the State of Palestine and its admission to full membership in the United Nations, providing educational and health services to those affected by conflicts and disputes in the region, in cooperation and coordination with international and regional organizations, and developing Arab cooperation in the field of financial technology, innovation and digital transformation.

A peace process involving only the direct parties, or with a limited number of States, cannot achieve broader regional engagement, which is essential to establishing a stable and sustainable environment in the Middle East that brings peace, security, prosperity and opportunity to all its States and peoples.

From this international forum, I would like to commend the announcement by His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth in his inaugural speech to the British Parliament this morning, namely, that the British Government will work on playing its part and guaranteeing peace and security on the long term in the Middle East, and that it is committed to the two-State solution whereby Israel would live within secured borders, side by side with a sovereign Palestinian State.

We are convinced that the international community today faces a genuine, historic opportunity to achieve peace, security and stability in the Middle East and to successfully fulfil its responsibilities and commitment in our region, as has occurred in other similar conflicts

in the world. Working with the Security Council, the General Assembly and Member States individually, I believe that we are capable of establishing an international coalition of nations willing to achieve genuine peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East. At this difficult historical juncture, we can unite efforts not only to overcome the immediate challenge and end the horrific violence and suffering in the Gaza Strip, but also to shape the future that the Middle East and its peoples deserve.

Accordingly, in the context of the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, for the provision of full humanitarian assistance to the civilian population and for the release of hostages and detainees, and in the context of the affirmation of the common Arab commitment to peace as a strategic option based on the two-State solution, I would like to urge the Council and the international community as a whole to work seriously and effectively with the Arab States to end that long-standing conflict and deliver a better future for the Middle East region and all its peoples.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon.

**Mr. Bouhabib** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting again today in the Security Council, at the kind invitation of the Russian Federation, to discuss the volatile situation in the Middle East, which has lasted more than nine months. The conflict has widened, conditions have deteriorated, and the ball of fire rages on, following the international community's inability thus far to implement United Nations resolutions aimed at a ceasefire in Gaza, the exchange of prisoners and hostages and the entry of aid, medicine and life-sustaining food into the Gaza Strip.

In recent months, Lebanese officials have received several warnings about the risk of the war spreading to Lebanon. We have also heard dozens of statements by senior Israeli officials threatening to burn Lebanon, to destroy it and to return it back to the Stone Age. From this Chamber, we reiterate our warning against miscalculation, brinkmanship and attempts to drag the entire region into a conflagration. Also from this Chamber, we reiterate our rejection of the war and our tireless efforts, through contacts and meetings, to avoid falling into the trap of Israeli recklessness, which seeks to continue the war and expand its geographical scope. Such a war, if it occurs, will shake the entire Middle

East. It will be transboundary in nature and will lead to a new displacement crisis — from which Europe will not be spared — involving people not only from Lebanon and Israel, but also from neighbouring countries, as people flee missiles, drones and warplanes. War will also lead to destruction, devastation and misery for the entire region and a lack of opportunities for a dignified life for its peoples and inhabitants, which means further migration and displacement.

Therefore Lebanon, a geographically small State but a State with an expansive global reach, culture and history, is increasingly committed to international legitimacy and protected by its resolutions. For Lebanon, the United Nations will remain the line of defence that shelters us and the last refuge from the illogic of occupation, brutality and violence. Today we are in dire need of the United Nations Organization as a refuge for peace-loving small countries, including my homeland, Lebanon.

At the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East held on 23 January (see S/PV.9534), we put forward an integrated framework for sustainable calm on Lebanon's southern border. Today we reiterate our call for a ceasefire to move forward towards full and undiminished implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), which has proven its ability to establish relative stability in southern Lebanon from the end of the July 2006 war until 7 October 2023. The shortest way for tens of thousands of displaced persons from both sides to return to their homes is not through the threat of war or the opening of another front, but through the full and comprehensive implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) as part of an integrated package with clear and declared international guarantees to promote sustainable security and calm in southern Lebanon, as per the following.

First, we should facilitate the swift and safe return of displaced persons from the border areas from which they were displaced after 7 October 2023 and ensure the return to normal life in all border villages and towns.

Secondly, there must be a definitive cessation of Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and internationally recognized borders by air, land and sea, which have exceeded 35,000 since the year 2006.

Thirdly, there must be a halt to cyberattacks that threaten the safety and security of networks, devices, applications and electronic data in vital Lebanese facilities, especially Rafik Hariri International Airport,

which threatens public safety and adversely affects their work.

Fourthly, the United Nations and friendly countries should support the Lebanese Government in deploying the Lebanese army south of the Litani River and provide it with the necessary equipment and support to bolster its ranks so that there will be no weapons there other than those approved by the Lebanese Government, as well as no authority except that of the Lebanese Government, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

Fifthly, the internationally recognized borders between Lebanon and Palestine as demarcated in 1923 must be enacted, as underscored in the Lebanese-Israeli armistice agreement signed on the Greek island of Rhodes in 1949 under the auspices of the United Nations. That should be done by completing the process of agreeing on the 13 disputed border points. As such, Israel must withdraw from all Lebanese territories to the internationally recognized borders that it continues to occupy.

Sixthly, there must be adherence to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as it has been since inception a factor for calm and stability in southern Lebanon. We underscore the importance of its constructive role in maintaining peace and security for decades despite the major sacrifices it has made and the challenges it has faced, particularly in the recent months. Accordingly, last month we submitted a request for the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate without any modification. We look forward to working and cooperating with all members of the Security Council to achieve that, given the central role played by UNIFIL.

We have demanded, and demand anew, an end to the war in Gaza and an end to the escalation in southern Lebanon. To date, Israel continues to refuse a ceasefire on Lebanon's southern border, has sought to keep the front as hotspot and continues to expand the scope of its aggression, burning thousands of ancient olive trees and polluting agricultural land with white phosphorus so that it becomes unsuitable for cultivation for many years, thereby depriving farmers in southern Lebanon of their main — and perhaps only — source of livelihood. All of that serves to fuel hatred, extremism, violence and the culture of cancelling the other at a time when we are in dire need for achieving calm, de-escalation and overall stability.

The inflamed front on the southern border of Lebanon exists because of the continued war in Gaza.

Palestine will remain the key to stability in the Middle East. Despite the tragedy in Gaza today, we need to cooperate and create a historic opportunity to chart a future that is better for the coming generations in all the countries of the region. It has been 76 years since the United Nations resolution was adopted to establish two States in historic Palestine. Only one of those two States has been established. Peace in our region will not be achieved until the promised Palestinian State is established in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the 2002 Summit of the League of Arab States, held in Beirut, and based on the principle of land for peace, that is, the two-State solution. The recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to a free and decent life on their territories is the key to peace, security and prosperity for all the countries of the Middle East.

Double standards in the application of international law and resolutions, especially those adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council and specialized international organizations, constitute an existential challenge to our global system, its foundation and pillars. With regard to the occupied Palestinian territories, namely, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, we deplore the fact that the international will and the way United Nations resolutions are implemented are being taken lightly, in addition to the flagrant violations of international law and human rights law.

The right of Palestinians to live in dignity and freedom and enjoy the right to medicine, education, housing and food are basics of human life in the twenty-first century. How can an entire people be left to the whims of the occupier to die from hunger, thirst and disease? Hundreds of thousands of innocent Palestinians, including children, women and elderly, have committed no fault except that they were born and live and die daily under occupation.

In conclusion, we are committed to optimism and hope, to ensuring free and dignified coexistence and to the constant pursuit of achieving stability, peace and security, no matter how long it takes. We are not seeking cancellation, killing and displacement. We in Lebanon have paid the highest price as a result of the wars that we have suffered. We have tasted their bitterness. We have paid the highest price to defend and advocate for the rights of Palestine and its people. We are still paying the highest price, sometimes beyond our

capacity. We come here today to call on the Council to give peace a chance after decades of occupation and conflict. Are not 76 years of wars, killing and tragedies enough? Are we not going to learn from the bitter past? Is it not time to give peace a chance? Let us start this long journey of 1,000 miles by implementing the last four United Nations resolutions on the war in Gaza, the most recent of which is resolution 2735 (2024), in order to stop the machine of violence and destruction, return to the path of peace and find a just and final solution to the Palestinian question. Is it not yet time to end the sufferings and tragedies and to build a better future for all of the peoples of our region?

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Libya.

**Mr. Elbaour** (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to thank you for inviting us to take part in today's meeting.

Despite the repeated calls and the many meetings that have been convened by the international community and the United Nations, the world continues to witness on a daily basis new massacres perpetrated by the occupying State in populated areas. Those attacks have killed many elderly persons, children and women, under the pretext of targeting Hamas locations, its leaders and related resistance factions.

Reports indicate that the recent massacre at Al-Mawasi, which had been identified as a humanitarian area that shelters displaced people, resulted in hundreds of killed or wounded persons and many more missing, according to the World Health Organization. More than nine months have passed since the start of the Zionist aggression. It is shameful that resolutions of the Security Council, the international community and the Human Rights Council, along with the orders of the International Court of Justice and demands made by the international community, continue to be merely words on paper and have not deterred the Zionist entity from perpetrating its crimes as it continues its barbaric acts and daily attacks. The massacres against the Palestinian people have now become ordinary news items. The international community stands by and watches, merely issuing statements of condemnation that have changed nothing on the ground.

It is known that the genocide and ethnic cleansing being perpetrated by the occupying State against the

Palestinian people, along with its systemic and barbaric practices, have gone beyond all international norms and limits, even the law of the jungle, and clearly violate all international conventions and laws. My country strongly rejects what our brothers in Palestine are being subjected to in terms of killing, destruction and displacement. We reject the double standards being practiced by some in dealing with the Palestinian question and the fact that they ignore the ugly and heinous crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians. Some have even offered justifications and participated in and encouraged those crimes by furnishing the occupying State with weapons to kill unarmed civilians. Human values and international law cannot be separated and cannot be tailored to meet the interests of the stronger and to crush the weak and the helpless.

Despite the fact that the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire to save the lives of innocent people and calling on all parties to abide by it and by international law, the absence of political will has made it impossible to stop the bloodshed. At the same time, we reject and warn against expanding the scope of the war to Lebanese territories, and we condemn in the strongest terms the use of internationally banned weapons.

My country joined South Africa and a number of other States in the legal case submitted to the International Court of Justice to bring justice to the Palestinian people and defend their right to live peacefully on their own land. We once again demand that the Security Council abide by the implementation of its own resolutions and the relevant resolutions on establishing a ceasefire and providing urgent and unconditional aid. We call on it to resolve the Palestinian question in accordance with the initiatives by the League of Arab States and the most recent initiative, which underscore the need for a lasting peace by way of the Two-State solution.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the Palestinian people have the right to determine their own destiny, just like other peoples. The Palestinian people have every right to defend themselves. Their cause is just, and years of struggle and attempts at reaching a settlement in accordance with international resolutions and terms of reference have proven that a solution can be achieved only by addressing the root causes of the Palestinian question and acknowledging the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, foremost of which is their right to establish an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif

as its capital. We reiterate and stress the right of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations as a step towards a just and comprehensive solution that achieves equality among the countries and the peoples of the world.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

**Mr. Al-Yahya** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the Russian Federation for its tireless efforts while presiding over the Council at a delicate time and for organizing this important meeting to discuss the serious developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank the Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing and appreciate his role and constructive efforts in that regard.

Our meeting today is being held as we witness with great pain the continued military operations by the Israeli occupation forces against our Palestinian brothers. The Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip is now in its tenth month. That reveals a state of destruction in humanitarian terms, with nearly 40,000 killed and more than 88,000 injured, mostly women and children. The total number of victims under the rubble is unknown.

The catastrophic humanitarian losses in the Gaza Strip have been accompanied by unprecedented destruction. The incursions by the occupying authority and its strikes throughout occupied Palestinian territories have ruined houses and turned schools into battlefields and hospitals into places of pain and powerlessness. Despite the repeated international calls to stop that flagrant aggression, the occupying authority continues to ignore all calls for a ceasefire. It continues to cut short lives without any distinction. Its operations clearly have no military objectives. Rather, its aim is to systematically destroy and terrorize Palestinians and wipe out their existence and bring their question to an end. That is a barbaric act that calls into question all meaning of humanity.

The continued Israeli aggression, while ignoring all international laws and regulations, in particular international humanitarian law, seeks to besiege the Palestinian people and places them before a tragic reality of either accepting the violence and renouncing their territory and national legitimate rights, or facing genocide, ethnic cleansing and total elimination of the

Palestinian national scheme. That is a war crime and a crime against humanity.

The State of Kuwait reiterates its strong condemnation of those crimes and acts of aggression. We underscore our firm support for the Palestinian people on their land. We always demand that the international community take all the measures necessary to put an end to the aggression, which has claimed tens of thousands of innocent victims, and to put an end to displacements. That is ethnic cleansing. We call for unconditional humanitarian relief to be delivered to the people of Gaza. In that regard, we reiterate the importance of the pivotal role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That role is essential in supporting the Palestinian people in their darkest and most difficult times.

The State of Kuwait has repeatedly warned of the repercussions of the way in which the international community is addressing the Palestinian question, namely, with double standards. It has been unable to reach a just, comprehensive and definitive solution to that question. It must deter the occupying authority from committing its criminal practices and continued violations of international law and of its unilateral actions to alter the legal and historic status quo on the occupied territories. The Security Council's inability to assume its responsibilities and the international community's ignoring of the Council's resolutions have led to a situation of frustration and despair in the minds of Palestinian generations that, like all other peoples of the world, want only to live a dignified and safe life in their own homeland.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait reiterates its principled and firm position of solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in their quest to exercise their legitimate rights, including establishing an independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders. We are committed to the choice of a just and comprehensive peace within the parameters of the terms of reference and relevant international resolutions. We support all international efforts and initiatives to arrive at a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, leading to peace, security and development in the region and for its peoples.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

**Mr. Jalichandra** (Thailand): I wish to thank the Russian Federation for convening this quarterly open debate.

It has been 10 months since the conflict in Gaza began. Thailand remains gravely concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the area. During these months, we have seen widespread hunger and famine, the collapse of the health-care and educational systems and the loss of more than 34,000 innocent civilian lives. As hostilities continue intensively, the already dire humanitarian crisis has worsened in Gaza. There has been a high cost in human lives. We repeat our call for the immediate, full and complete ceasefire.

We are also concerned about the heightened risk of conflict taking on a more regional dimension. It is therefore an urgent issue for the Security Council to prevent that. In that regard, the adoption of the resolution 2735 (2024) in June this year was a major step forward. We appeal to all parties to implement the resolution as well as other relevant Security Council resolutions.

We also urge all sides to comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. That entails ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian objects, humanitarian access, the protection of humanitarian personnel and their freedom of movement and the unimpeded provision of urgently needed basic humanitarian services and assistance.

The protection of civilians must be a priority at all times. We oppose all forms of violence and attacks against civilians, regardless of their nationalities. We also call for the protection of United Nations staff and premises, hospitals and public buildings. We reiterate our plea for the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages, including Thai nationals, as well as their proper treatment and care, pending their release.

We emphasize the need to ensure uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to Gaza. We wish to commend Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, and her team for their unwavering dedication and efforts to facilitate and support the work of all humanitarian partners on the ground to alleviate the plight of the Palestinians. We reiterate our continued support for such efforts.

We also commend the work being done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as the backbone of aid response in Gaza. Recognizing the irreplaceable role of UNRWA, Thailand joins the Secretary-General and other Member States in appealing to the international community to resume or continue to support UNRWA. Thailand recently provided an additional \$50,000 financial contribution to the second UNRWA flash appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory covering the period from April to December 2024. We will also donate another \$100,000 to the Egyptian Red Crescent to support humanitarian assistance for Palestinian refugees. Thailand hopes that our contributions will help enable UNRWA to continue its mandate for the benefit of the Palestinian refugees in response to the current humanitarian situation.

Thailand reaffirms our support for genuine dialogue to find a mutually agreed peaceful solution to the issue, in accordance with the two-State solution, by which the States of Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, and consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

**The President** (*spoke in Russian*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on the list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.*