



General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

59th plenary meeting
Monday, 4 March 2024, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Francis (Trinidad and Tobago)

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

Agenda item 63 (continued)

Use of the veto

Special report of the Security Council (A/78/786)

The President: The General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 63, entitled “Use of the veto”, to hold a debate, pursuant to resolution 76/262, of 26 April 2022, on the situation as to which a veto was cast by a permanent member of the Security Council at the 9552nd meeting of the Council, held on 20 February 2024, under the agenda item entitled “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (see S/PV.9552).

Statement by the President

The President: From the inception of the United Nations in 1945, the General Assembly and the Security Council have both shared a single overarching duty: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. The purpose of our meeting today underscores the vital importance of that joint responsibility and of the urgency for the two organs to strengthen their collective efforts within their respective mandates under the Charter of the United Nations to preserve and promote global peace and security. In that context, I strongly urge Member States to engage in today’s debate with a proactive, solution-oriented posture, mindful of all Member States’ responsibility to exert every effort to avert further violence and to save lives.

While I welcome the introduction and utility of the veto initiative, most especially in relation to the accountability it seeks to foster, it is nevertheless deeply regrettable that, compliant with the rules of procedure, the General Assembly must use it at all in connection with the current deepening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

As members know, the situation in Gaza is catastrophic, unconscionable, Shameful. I am shocked and horrified at the reported killing and injuring of hundreds of people during the disbursement of food supplies west of Gaza City last week. This comes as the death toll in Israel and the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023 has reached the 30,000 mark. Thousands of children have been killed. They are scrounging for food and watching their childhoods evaporate into the horrors of war. Moreover, recently published reports have indicated that a number of babies have died of malnutrition and starvation in Gaza. Countless communities have been decimated. Countless families have vanished intergenerationally. Countless mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, nieces and nephews — all gone. As the French would say, *disparu* — “disappeared”. Their dreams extinguished. Their potential lost forever. And their futures obliterated.

Eighty-five per cent of Gaza’s population or 1.9 million people are internally displaced. Nearly 1.5 million of them now reside in Rafah. That is more than six times the population prior to 7 October. I repeat: six times. I am deeply concerned about intensified Israeli air strikes in Rafah, including in residential areas. In the words of United Nations Emergency Relief

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0928 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



Coordinator Martin Griffiths, any ground operation in such a densely populated area would leave an already fragile humanitarian operation at death's door. I therefore urgently call for maximum restraint to prevail in order to save innocent civilian lives.

Israeli restrictions on humanitarian access have drastically reduced the flow of life-saving aid to a mere trickle. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reports a significant 50 per cent reduction in the number of trucks entering Gaza daily from January to February. It is therefore essential that we rapidly and substantially increase the scale of humanitarian operations and ensure unrestricted access to all civilians in need.

The will of the international community, as already expressed in the vote by the overwhelming majority of this Assembly's membership, is unambiguous, clear and resolute. And I feel myself duty-bound to reiterate that will here today, as it cannot continue to go unheeded. First and foremost, an immediate humanitarian ceasefire must be implemented. The bombardment must stop now. Secondly, all parties must comply with their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially as it relates to the protection of civilians and civilian facilities. Thirdly, all hostages must be immediately and unconditionally released. And finally, full and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance by those in need must be ensured.

Recalling that, under the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council acts on behalf of the entire United Nations membership, I call upon all members of the Council, especially the permanent members, to redouble their efforts to reach a consensus that would bring about a safe, just and immediate response, compliant with those demands. All parties must do their utmost to meet those demands, and both preserve and save lives.

Let me conclude with a reminder that this week marks a grim milestone: 150 days of violence — 150 days of violence breeding violence, despair, destruction and devastation and the dehumanization of people. Each day that painful reality continues to entrench the feeling of frustration and disillusionment, especially by those caught up in the crossfire, who look to the United Nations as a guarantor of good. Each day that passes risks a deepening failure to meet our moral obligations

and duties. And each life lost adds to the stain on our collective conscience.

With resolve and urgency, let us therefore work much harder to immediately end this conflict and to lay down the foundations of a future in which Israel and the State of Palestine can coexist peacefully — two States living side by side in harmony, united by a single shared vision for a brighter, more hopeful destiny. As an outcome of the deliberations today and as per previous practice, my Office will share a summary with the President of the Security Council and the entire United Nations membership.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Over the past month, the United States has said clearly and repeatedly that the draft resolution (S/2024/173) that was before the Security Council would not achieve the goal of a sustainable peace and might, in fact, run counter to it. We did not believe that the draft resolution, in and of itself, would have resulted in a ceasefire. We urged our colleagues not to proceed with a vote and cautioned that doing so could disrupt the intensive efforts already under way to get an agreement that results in the release of the remaining hostages and that produces a temporary ceasefire. That work, alongside partners including Qatar and Egypt, continues as we speak.

To support those sensitive negotiations, we have circulated a Security Council draft resolution that calls for a temporary ceasefire together with the release of all hostages as soon as possible. We have appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in the Council on that text and hope that it can be adopted. That temporary ceasefire would allow hostages to return home to their families. It would bring a halt to the widespread suffering of so many Palestinian children, women and men who are caught up in this crossfire of Hamas's making. And it would help get aid into the hands of Palestinian civilians, who desperately need it. We will continue engaging on that text so that the Council can finally condemn Hamas for its horrific attacks on 7 October 2023, which set this crisis into motion, so that we can empower the United Nations to get aid to civilians more efficiently and effectively and so that, ultimately, we can together help create a future in which Israelis and Palestinians live in States of their own, side by side, and in peace.

The question before us is: what is the most effective way to achieve those goals? And in our judgment, it is the work that the United States is undertaking both here

in New York and on the ground. We therefore remain committed to engaging constructively on our draft resolution in the days to come. We will keep working through all channels to expedite humanitarian support for the Palestinian people so that more aid gets in, through more places, to reach more people. And we will continue to engage tirelessly in direct diplomacy and negotiations on the ground.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): There is no greater threat to international peace and security than the commission of atrocities. And yet, for five months now, Israel has been committing atrocities against the Palestinian people, unchecked and unhinged, and the Security Council has been prevented repeatedly from calling for an immediate ceasefire to put an end to those atrocities. That is what we are talking about, and that is why we are here today: stopping the daily war crimes and crimes against humanity that are integral to the Israeli assault and putting an end to the genocide under way.

Israel has unleashed death against 2.3 million Palestinians under multiple forms: indiscriminate bombing, summary executions, disease, dehydration and starvation. Starvation is not an unfortunate consequence of the war; it is one of the methods of war used by Israel. Israel is starving our people, a people besieged, bombarded, killed and maimed and displaced. Israel is starving our children, orphaned, disabled, terrorized. Have members seen the images of Palestinian children as their lives were taken away, or their limbs? Have they seen — shivering, scared, scarred? Have they seen them being starved? Mahmoud Fattouh died of acute malnutrition. He was two months old. Yazan Al-Kafarna was a lively boy. He had been lying on a hospital bed for days, barely able to move. He died of malnutrition today. He was killed by Israel using starvation as a weapon. Look at our children. Look at Yazan. Look at what agony they are enduring. A dozen more children who died of malnutrition have been identified, and many more have died — and are dying — in darkness and destitution. That has to stop, for God's sake, that has to stop. This is a war of atrocities. From its first day and ever since, Israeli soldiers have been filming their crimes and counting their victims. Israeli leaders are speaking and acting like war criminals. Israel must be told to cease fire, to cease fire now.

The State of Palestine is a strong supporter of the French-Mexican initiative to restrain the veto in case of mass atrocities and of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, which calls on all Security Council members to not vote against any credible draft resolution intended to prevent or halt mass atrocities. Had those principles been heeded, the Security Council would have called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire months ago, like the Assembly has done, thereby helping to spare tens of thousands of lives and preventing the terrible suffering endured by over 2 million Palestinians for five months now.

Our people are not lesser people. Our children are not less worthy. Their lives are not less sacred. The dehumanization we have endured aims at making the killing of our people more acceptable. As we are fully aware of the genuine solidarity of billions around the world, we are also acutely aware of those who have a much higher threshold of tolerance for Palestinian death than Israeli death, of those who believe that Israeli security somehow trumps the right to the life and freedom of a nation, of those who consider us a lesser race, who have difficulty seeing us as victims, and who refuse to admit that those killing us are perpetrators of crimes — even when those crimes are occurring in broad daylight for all to see, for everyone here to see, as they have been seeing.

It is therefore appropriate that the Vice-President of the United States chose Selma, Alabama, to call for an immediate ceasefire. She spoke of the suffering of the Palestinian people, of the many innocent Palestinians who have been killed, of how hungry, desperate people, trying to secure food for their families, were met with gunfire in Gaza City. She concluded by saying: "our common humanity compels us to act". Speaking to the meaning of Selma, Vice-President Harris said: "Freedom is not to be given. It is not to be bestowed. It is ours by right." And members should say with us: freedom for the Palestinian people is not to be given; it is not to be bestowed; it is ours by right.

There is a reason that ethnic cleansing was possible in Palestine, why apartheid was possible in Palestine and why genocide was possible in Palestine — the certainty of the perpetrators that they will never be held accountable. Palestinian victims for decades were left to be killed and maimed and displaced and dispossessed

and denied their most fundamental rights, until the horror culminated with the massacres in Gaza.

Israeli leaders speak openly of the crimes they are committing and of those they intend to commit. They pass laws, adopt budgets and determine military strategies, allowing and enabling those crimes. The Israeli Prime Minister has boasted about not abiding by decisions of international courts or United Nations resolutions, and of having torpedoed peace efforts. That will end only by ending Israeli impunity. The era of Israeli impunity must come to an end, and we should enter a new era of accountability and sanctions. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has yet to issue a single arrest warrant. The International Court of Justice has a number of important decisions to make. But States and the United Nations also have obligations they must uphold.

Israel cannot be allowed to sit among us, lecturing the rest of the world for rejecting its crimes, attacking the United Nations and its Member States and undermining regional and international peace and security without consequences. Israel has been emboldened to such a point that it feels no shame for its crimes, no regret towards its victims; that it openly defies its closest allies; that it mocks this Organization, its General Assembly, its Security Council and its Human Rights Council; that it stomps on its Charter and on every rule of international law ever elaborated. Israel should be sanctioned. This is the time to do so in order to force them to behave and to comply with obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and belonging to this Organization, not rewarded for its actions. Israel believes it is a State above the law, and as long as that belief is not shattered — and it should be shattered — it will continue acting as an outlaw State.

One hundred thousand Palestinians have been killed or maimed, 1.9 million have been displaced, 2.2 million are enduring hunger and dehydration. We have a collective duty, all of us, to bring that unspeakable suffering to an end.

Israel considers that the Palestinian people have three options: displacement, subjugation or murder, ethnic cleansing, apartheid or genocide. Who can any longer support such a despicable scheme? Who can any further shield those committing it? Sending it its weapons, or money, or providing it with any form of support is unacceptable for as long as it has

not abandoned those criminal policies toward the Palestinian people.

We salute the people who mobilized around the world for Palestinian freedom. We thank them for their principled, heroic positions, including the hundreds of thousands in the streets of New York, Washington, D.C., and more than 85 other cities in the United States during the past few days. We salute the workers who are refusing to ship weapons to Israel, and we ask every country, their workers, not to load ships carrying weapons and ammunition to go to Israel to kill Palestinian children and Palestinian civilians. And I hope that all of members' workers in their ports and airports will do likewise, because that is the right thing that should be done. As one day in the past a few brave workers in a grocery store in Ireland started the boycott movement against the abhorrent system of apartheid, there are brave workers today who are beginning the process of not loading weapons and ammunition bound for Israel, to unleash a movement with the billions of people who are demonstrating in the streets to hold Israel accountable for the crimes committed against the Palestinian people. We salute all those who are doing those principled heroic things in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

We salute the individuals and entities rejecting trade with settlements; not only because settlers should be sanctioned, but the entire enterprise of settlements and settlers should be sanctioned. Do not allow a single one of them to get a visa to visit any of members' countries. Behave in a different way. Show them that you mean business, honouring and upholding international law and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

And we salute all those working to advance accountability. The horrors of today are made possible by yesterday's failings. We need to correct course today to generate hope tomorrow. Death and devastation and despair have prevailed because of Israeli actions, but also because of international inaction. The international mobilization we have witnessed these past few months at the United Nations, but also by States parties to the ICC and before the International Court of Justice in recent days, must translate into an international plan for justice, freedom and peace, and in that order. Palestine will be free. Its people will be free. And then, only then, will peace be a reality for all to enjoy.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): I deliver this statement on behalf of a cross-regional group of countries

committed to the effective implementation of resolution 76/262, known as the veto initiative, namely, Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Iceland, Kenya, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and my own country, Liechtenstein.

We have now seen six vetoes by three permanent members of the Security Council on draft resolutions and amendments related to the ongoing massive humanitarian and protection-of-civilians emergency in Gaza. Four texts — two draft resolutions and two amendments — have in addition failed to be adopted for a lack of sufficient votes. We are grateful to those members that worked towards the adoption of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023), and we urge the implementation of those resolutions. We call on the Council to act in accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, as well as its responsibility to our Organization and to protect civilians. And we encourage the Assembly to make the most of its Charter-defined role to inspire necessary action where it is prevented by the use and threat of the veto. We also remind all signatories to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct, both in the General Assembly and the Council, of their commitments in that regard.

The Charter of the United Nations makes clear that Member States have conferred on the Security Council the primary responsibility for peace and security and that, in carrying out its duties under that responsibility, the Council acts on our behalf. We also note that the membership, both in meetings such as today's and in the emergency special session, has demonstrated its desire to bring an end to the ongoing crisis. But the use, and threat of use, of the veto has clearly and significantly constrained Security Council action and, as a result, our collective capacity to act. The veto limits the ambition of potential proposals precisely when it is most needed.

Article 1, paragraph 1, of Charter of the United Nations calls upon the membership

“to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace”.

The Council is not only meant to approve agreements reached elsewhere but to be the author of action in line with the purposes of the Charter. We have all agreed, under Article 25, to accept and carry out the decisions

of the Security Council in accordance with the Charter. Accordingly, the Assembly cannot only lament missed opportunities for Council action, but should set out our expectations for the Organization, for its Members and, in particular, for the Council, to which our primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security is delegated in this case.

We recall that a meeting called in line with resolution 76/262 indeed allows for the adoption of a draft resolution. We also commend to the General Assembly the use of its functions and powers outlined in Articles 10 to 14 of the Charter, including to make formal and explicit recommendations to the Security Council in relation to any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as the further capacities it has under the “uniting for peace” resolution (resolution 377 A (V)) in the absence of Council action. In the context of transforming global governance processes, we should also consider how to empower the General Assembly to act more decisively when the Security Council is unable to do so. We urge all interested Member States to work with us to consider actions we can take collectively to that end.

I shall now make some brief remarks in my national capacity.

Liechtenstein is deeply troubled by the fourth veto on the situation in Gaza cast by the United States. That veto has obstructed Council action on a draft resolution (S/2024/173) supported by 13 Security Council members calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, unimpeded aid delivery to all parts of Gaza, rejection of forced Palestinian displacement, compliance with provisional measures mandated by the International Court of Justice and adherence to international humanitarian law by all parties. We acknowledge the tireless efforts made by the elected members in particular to ensure that the Council can fulfil its responsibility.

The General Assembly must step in, as it has done previously. The imperatives outlined in the past resolutions adopted by the Assembly are mutually reinforcing. A durable ceasefire is the most important step towards ensuring full, immediate, safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access, as well as to enable the release of all hostages.

Our highest priority continues to be the protection of civilians. Against that background, possible ground operations in Rafah are particularly alarming. All parties must uphold international humanitarian law,

and we note the 2022 political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The forced displacement of Palestinians undermines the two-State solution and is illegal under international humanitarian and criminal law. We also join the call for an international investigation into the killing of more than 100 civilians in a single incident last week and recall the jurisdiction that the International Criminal Court has in that regard.

Over 70 per cent of essential infrastructure in Gaza lies destroyed or damaged, hindering access to basic needs, while nearly the entire population, some 2 million people, face the risk of famine. Those tragic realities underscore the urgency of immediate action. We again join the call for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian ceasefire, the protection of civilians and full respect for international humanitarian law, including immediate unimpeded humanitarian access.

Liechtenstein again condemns in the strongest possible terms the heinous 7 October 2023 terrorist attacks by Hamas and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

We also reiterate our support for the role of the International Court of Justice in resolving disputes under the Genocide Convention and emphasize the importance of compliance with provisional measures ordered by the Court.

Finally, we reaffirm the Palestinian right to self-determination and reiterate our strong support for a two-State solution as the only way to bring about a peaceful, stable and sustainable solution for the region.

Mr. Erdan (Israel): Here we are once again, 150 days after Hamas committed the most brutal and barbaric massacre since the Holocaust. And once again, this body has convened not to condemn Hamas, no, not to condemn their atrocities, but to focus again only on the situation in Gaza. As if 7 October 2023 never happened, as if 134 innocent hostages were not being held and tortured in Gaza right now. Unbelievable. The General Assembly is committed to the survival of a terror organization — the institution that was established in the wake of the Holocaust to prevent atrocities, now united to defend a terror organization no different than the Nazis. If Franklin Roosevelt could see what the institution now stands for, he would be turning in his grave. Five months have passed and not even one United Nations body has condemned Hamas. How do members have the conscience to sleep soundly

at night? Thousands of Israelis still mourn their loved ones murdered in ways that would make the Nazis proud — entire communities deliberately turned to ash, deliberately, and the General Assembly cannot even condemn a pogrom. The moral bankruptcy truly knows no bounds.

This week, the world will mark International Women's Day. Next week, the Commission on the Status of Women will convene to discuss the challenges that women face worldwide. Yet this year, the silence of the United Nations and of UN-WOMEN in the face of Hamas's sexual violence has turned International Women's Day into a sick joke. That is the height of United Nations hypocrisy. The United Nations claims to care about women yet, as we speak right now, Israeli women are being raped and abused by Hamas terrorists. Where is the voice of the United Nations? Where is the voice of its members? Silence, deafening silence. Sure, we have heard the empty words of United Nations officials calling for the release of the hostages, but have we seen any of them take action? Nothing, zero, deafening silence. Over the past five months, there has not been even one single discussion in the Hall dedicated to the well-being of the hostages — not one debate focused on the sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas, not one United Nations panel on the rape of and crimes against Israeli women. The United Nations should be ashamed of its silence. In the future, members will not be able to claim that they did not know, just as the world claimed after the Holocaust that States were not exposed to the suffering and horrors. Those who remain indifferent are complicit in the crimes themselves. Today, right before International Women's Day, members will hear testimonies of the sexual atrocities that Israeli women are enduring because of the apathy and indifference of the United Nations.

Members just heard the testimonies of released hostages, first responders and law enforcement officials. Members heard accounts of rape and heinous sexual abuse. Today those testimonies will receive official recognition from the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten. Will members still continue with their silence and indifference? What if they were the daughters, the granddaughters of representatives? Would members continue to ignore them or would they demand immediate action? Why do those women's murders and sexual abuse mean nothing to the United Nations? Why?

In mere hours, Special Representative Patten will present her report on the sexual crimes that took place on 7 October. In the report, she will outline that during Hamas's attack rape, gang rape, necrophilia, sexual violence and forced defilement were carried out. The report will also highlight that Hamas terrorists sexually abused female hostages and that such acts are likely still ongoing. Will that wake members up? Will it change their priorities? Will members understand that a ceasefire basically means abandoning those women to sexually abusive Hamas monsters? Perhaps members will finally understand that the United Nations has become a collaborator, a collaborator with rapists and perverts. If the deafening silence of the United Nations continues, despite the findings in the report, that will definitely be the last nail in the coffin of the United Nations. It will lose any remaining legitimacy.

I call on the Secretary-General and the Security Council to convene immediately to finally condemn Hamas's heinous crimes. Hamas must face unrelenting pressure to end its sexual violence and release all of the hostages immediately. I reiterate: any calls for a ceasefire only give Hamas a green light to continue raping and abusing the hostages.

Through its silence and inaction, the United Nations has proved that it prefers collaborating with terrorists than standing alongside the vibrant democracy of Israel. Tragically, the United Nations is not only a terror collaborator. Israel recently exposed the true colours of the United Nations. In Gaza, it is very sad to say, the United Nations is a terror organization itself. Dozens of employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) took part in the 7 October massacre, while many more praised the savage attack. Now look at this short footage from 7 October.

That is Faisal Ali Musalem Al-Naami, an UNRWA social worker, stuffing the body of Jonathan Samerano into a truck to be taken to Gaza. United Nations employees are kidnapping Israeli children. A Hamas data centre was located underneath UNRWA headquarters, connected to its power supply, and terror tunnels have been found underneath many UNRWA facilities. Listen to the numbers: out of the 13,000 employees of UNRWA in Gaza, 12 per cent are members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and hundreds of them are active terrorists.

UNRWA has been proven to be an instrumental part of Hamas's terror machine. For years, Hamas has infiltrated and poisoned the organization, but UNRWA, even before Hamas hijacked it in Gaza, has always been part of the problem and never part of the solution. The very basis for the existence of UNRWA is to eternally perpetuate the lie of Palestinian refugeehood. No other refugee population can pass refugee status down through generations like a family heirloom. Rather than seek to resettle or integrate Palestinian refugees, which we all expect it to do, UNRWA does the opposite — it ensures that a Palestinian refugee will forever remain a refugee, as will their children, grandchildren and every following generation, until one day they can all storm into Israel to claim it for themselves, exactly as Hamas did on 7 October.

But beyond perpetuating Palestinian refugeehood, UNRWA schools are a breeding ground for incitement, hatred and martyrdom. Numerous studies have reported on the terror glorification, jihad encouragement and antisemitism taught in UNRWA schools every day. UNRWA, with international financing, the financing of Member States, is grooming Palestinian children into terrorists.

After all that has been exposed about UNRWA, it is very clear today that UNRWA will never again operate in Gaza as it had prior to 7 October. Its role in Gaza is finished, and it must be replaced. UNRWA must be defunded and dismantled. Supporting UNRWA today is supporting Hamas. And whoever supports Hamas supports a future of bloodshed, not a future of peace and coexistence, as we want to see in Gaza, in Israel, everywhere.

While we hold this discussion in the Hall, there are hostages being tortured, being abused, being defiled. That is not speculation, it is fact. That is the hellish reality that Israeli women and men have been suffering for nearly five months, and the Organization's inaction is unforgivable. Yet even worse than its inaction, the ceaseless calls for a ceasefire are clear proof that the United Nations prefers the hostages to continue suffering. I implore members to make the release of the hostages their number one priority. That could change everything. The rape cannot continue. The sexual violence cannot continue. And Hamas's survival through a ceasefire cannot continue to be promoted and advanced here. Instead of calling for a ceasefire with no preconditions, the General Assembly and every United Nations body should be demanding that Hamas

terrorists turn themselves in and release all hostages. Those are the only acceptable terms for a real ceasefire. Hamas must be eliminated. Rapists and mass murderers must never be given a free pass by the United Nations, and terror can never be tolerated.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

Mr. Szijjártó (Hungary): I represent a central European country that has been faced with the consequences of the war in its neighbour Ukraine for a third consecutive year now. As a country that is located at the external border of both the European Union and its Schengen area, it protects its own border and the border of the European Union and has been confronted with the pressure of growing illegal migration that, as members all know, constitutes a vicious circle, together with terrorism. As a consequence of those two major and direct security-related challenges, Hungary is absolutely committed to standing up for peace, for the significance of diplomacy and for continued global engagement with dialogue. At the same time, Hungary is committed to continuing to stand up against any form of terrorism all over the world. We in Hungary are seriously concerned about the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. The longer it continues, the more seriously concerned we are.

Let me please explain to members the Hungarian position, which is based on four main pillars.

The first is that we have to make sure that no brutal terrorist attack like the one that was committed against Israel at the beginning of October 2023 takes place again in the world. No such terrorist attack must take place anywhere, not at any point in time or against anyone, in the future. We hope that the entire world will be united in delivering that message. Members in the Hall all see, I imagine, the growing threat of terror globally. Therefore, members cannot afford to lose any battle against any major terrorist organization. Hamas definitely has to be defeated.

Our second important point is that the escalation of that conflict must be avoided. We all know that, if that conflict escalates to just one more country, then the conflict will not stop, and that country would immediately become involved in a regional war. Such a regional war in that part of the world would pose an immediate risk for global security. We do not even want to think or imagine the consequences of that. We believe that the key factor is to prevent a so-called northern

front from being established. Therefore, we have to give all our possible support to the legitimate Government of Lebanon, because that Government clearly intends to avoid any kind of war with Israel, and we have to help them in order to avoid escalation there. As a result, we call upon all global and regional political actors to behave in a responsible way and to avoid any steps, even any statements, that would increase the threat or the risk of escalation.

My third point is that the civilian population must be protected. Ordinary people must be assured they will not suffer the heinous and brutal acts of terrorists. Therefore, all humanitarian aid must reach those in need, and all State actors and all international organizations must do their best to achieve that goal.

I would like to commend the role of Egypt, a country that has put a lot of effort into humanitarian action in recent months. I would like to inform members that Hungary has contributed more than \$9 million worth of assistance to improve health-care services in Egypt in order to withstand growing pressure.

I also must tell members that we find very cowardly the behaviour of terrorists that use innocent and defenceless civilians, especially children and women, as shields, and hide behind their backs. That is something that we will never understand and never accept.

My fourth and final point is that all hostages must be released immediately. We do not find any precondition that would be acceptable. I must tell members that we are extremely thankful to our friends from Qatar, a country without whose help three Hungarian hostages would not have been released. Hungary is therefore grateful for all the efforts Qatar has been making. I would like to ask the Government to continue to try to do its best in order to get all the hostages released. We still have one Hungarian missing; we hope that he is still alive. And we count on the help of Qatar and Egypt to have all the hostages released.

We are absolutely interested in a rational agreement or something that would give us hope before Ramadan starts. We find it really alarming that tensions might rise not only in Gaza and at the border with Lebanon but in the West Bank and at the holy sites of Jerusalem as well. We in Hungary hope that all international efforts to protect civilians against terrorism and escalation and to release the hostages will be continued. While Hungary is a strategic partner of Israel, we also have strong partnerships and close cooperation with Arab

countries of the region as well, and we are ready to play our part in that regard.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that we must not let the conflict in the Middle East be a root cause of the third global economic crisis in four years, after the coronavirus disease pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which both turned the global economy upside down. The international community must make sure that freedom of navigation and freedom of international maritime trade will be restored in the Red Sea region. If we fail there, then the stability of the global economy and the stability of Egypt, which has already been greatly harmed by a dramatic decrease in revenues from the Suez Canal, will be put at risk, and members all know that, if Egypt's stability is put in jeopardy, that will likely have a very negative impact on European security. Commercial deliveries from the East to the West — from the East to the European Union — are becoming uncertain, unpredictable and increasingly expensive. We do not want to have to face another external economic challenge, which would be the third in the last four years.

As a responsible country, Hungary is ready to play its part when it comes to finding a solution to global security crisis. We will help to ensure that the conflict in the Middle East is resolved as soon as possible and that the fight against global terrorism will finally be successful.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), namely, my country, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain. We align ourselves with the statement to be made on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important meeting, owing to the failure of the Security Council, yet again, to adopt a draft resolution, specifically draft resolution S/2024/173, which was submitted by the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria on behalf of the Group of Arab States (see S/PV.9552). The draft resolution submitted to the Council called for an immediate ceasefire to respond to the worst humanitarian disaster in modern human history, which has been caused by the ongoing aggression launched by Israeli occupation forces nearly

five months ago against our Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip. The number of casualties continues to rise as the victims now exceed 30,000, in addition to tens of thousands of wounded or missing under the debris, the majority of whom are women and children. Moreover, according to United Nations reports, there are 2 million internally displaced people in the Gaza Strip.

The GCC member States reiterate their deep regret with regard to the failure of the Security Council to adopt draft resolution S/2024/173, despite the fact that it garnered the support of 13 members of the Council. This failure constitutes a retreat from the historical foundational commitment stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations that calls for saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We also believe that the exercise of the veto has deprived the Security Council of an important opportunity to fulfil its responsibilities with regard to the ongoing aggression by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip, which threatens international peace and security, and which led the Secretary-General, in his letter addressed to the President of the Security Council last December (S/2023/962), to invoke Article 99 of the Charter, calling on the Council to declare an urgent humanitarian ceasefire.

The GCC member States recall the dangerous repercussions of the exercise of the veto in the context of efforts to stop the aggression and protect civilians in the Gaza Strip, sending a message of double standards in international relations and the way global crises are addressed. In the light of the failure of the Security Council, GCC member States call on the General Assembly to undertake its responsibility to safeguard international peace and security in accordance with Article 10 of the Charter. In that regard, we recall the need to enforce the most recent General Assembly resolution that called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (resolution ES-10/22).

The GCC member States reiterate their condemnation in the strongest terms of the Israeli threats to launch a military ground operation against the city of Rafah, and we warn that those threats have caused the levels of violence, destabilization and insecurity in the region to escalate. We also condemn in the strongest terms the measures taken to force displacement of the civilian population. We categorically reject any military operation in the city of Rafah and warn against any new massacre being added to the series of war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been committed in

the Gaza Strip and occupied Palestinian territory. We hold the Security Council responsible for not stopping the Israeli aggression.

The GCC member States also condemn the policies and measures of systematic starvation, wherein food is used by the Israeli occupiers as a weapon against defenceless civilians, especially in the northern Gaza Strip. We note that those methods are an extension of the blatant Israeli violations of international law and international humanitarian law and show a complete disregard for the order of the International Court of Justice dated 26 January 2024, which called on Israel to implement six provisional measures to prevent the crime of genocide. In that context, the GCC member States condemn the systematic targeting by the Israeli occupation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and regret the fact that some donor countries have suspended their UNRWA funding, which is indispensable for more than 5 million Palestinians, especially in the light of the ongoing catastrophic humanitarian conditions. We join the Secretary-General in appealing to the States that suspended their funding to UNRWA to reconsider their decision and resume funding the Agency.

Our States reiterate their firm and historic position in support of the brotherly Palestinian people in their resilience and just cause in accordance with international resolutions and in the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative, calling for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The GCC member States also express their appreciation for the sincere efforts to ensure the success of ongoing negotiations to reach a framework agreement for a new humanitarian truce in the Gaza Strip, including the efforts by my country, the State of Qatar, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States towards the release of prisoners and detainees, ensuring that more humanitarian and relief aid reaches the Gaza Strip and protecting civilians.

In conclusion, our States underscore the efforts made with our partners aimed at reaching an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in order to stop the shedding of the blood of our Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip and to protect the region from the risks of more violence. We stress the need for the Security Council to undertake its responsibilities.

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting. I deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

This meeting is taking place following the exercise of the veto by a permanent member of the Security Council against the draft resolution submitted to the Council by Algeria on behalf of the Group of Arab States (S/2024/173). This draft resolution called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, allowing the unhindered flow of humanitarian aid to the Strip and ending the forced displacement of the Palestinian population. The repeated failure of the Council to assume its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and stopping the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip is a stain on the conscience of the Council and of humankind as a whole. Since the draft resolution reflected a balanced position and prioritized humanitarian dimensions in order to save hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, it was disappointing to see a member of the Security Council exercise its veto right on such a draft for the third time since the start of the war in the Gaza Strip. That has allowed the military machine of the Israeli occupation to continue its massacres against Palestinian civilians, whose casualties have exceeded 30,000 martyrs and 100,000 injured, the majority of whom are women and children.

The ongoing brutal Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, with its systematic killings and massacres against civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, has had grave repercussions and caused a humanitarian catastrophe. The aggressors have targeted hospitals and medical personnel and places of worship, blocked humanitarian aid and starved the people of the Gaza Strip. Moreover, violations are currently being committed in the West Bank, while the Israeli entity Government threatens to invade Rafah and displace more than 1.5 million civilians, in full view of the world, which has unethically and inhumanely failed to protect Palestinian civilians, including abandoned children and women in Gaza, in a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, international law and human rights law. Indeed, all ethical, religious and humanitarian standards and values have been overlooked in a manner that is unprecedented in modern history. The continuation of these criminal practices and the danger of their escalation require the General Assembly and Member States to seriously

consider practical steps to stop the madness, cease the Palestinian bloodshed, end the systematic crimes against Palestinians, the majority of whom are women and children, and prevent a spillover of the conflict into the wider region.

The Group of Arab States calls upon the international community and the Security Council to guarantee the protection of civilians, ensure broad access to and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip without obstruction and implement resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Accordingly, we fully support the efforts made by the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, and her response to the catastrophic situation in the Strip.

The Arab Group reaffirms the pivotal role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and condemns all attempts by the Israeli occupation authorities to target, dismantle and terminate the presence of UNRWA as a way to serve its genocidal agenda, including through the starvation of the Palestinian people. We call on all donor countries that have suspended their funding to the Agency to reconsider their decision and take urgent measures to secure sufficient and sustainable funding for UNRWA so as to prevent an unprecedented humanitarian disaster for more than 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and neighbouring countries, who rely for their survival on the vital support of the Agency. The Arab Group appreciates the countries that have continued to support UNRWA and those that have doubled their contributions to UNRWA.

We warn against any Israeli ground attack against the city of Rafah, which is a refuge for more than 1.5 million Palestinians. We call on the international community and the Security Council to counter any Israeli plans to commit more crimes against Palestinian civilians, which will worsen an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe against the residents of Gaza.

If international law and all resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and the orders of the International Court of Justice as well as the calls of free countries around the world have not prevented Israel, the occupying Power, from conducting its massacres against the Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, then we have to pose the question as to whether that country should be allowed to keep its seat in the General Assembly and its subsidiary committees, or has the time come to take

practical steps in that regard and use sanctions against that entity, as was done in other contexts, in order to deter Israeli arrogance and intransigence? Israel is not a country above the law, and the policy of double standards should finally be stopped.

One of the first of steps countries can take is to stop providing Israel with weapons and ammunition that kill innocent Palestinians. Another is to impose stringent sanctions against all settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem, who practice or incite violence against the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation forces must face the repercussions of their brutal aggression and massacres against the Palestinians in Gaza, and they must bear responsibility for rebuilding what the savage Israeli military machine has destroyed and make reparations to all victims of the aggression.

The events in Gaza confirm that the granting of full membership at the United Nations to the State of Palestine is urgent and more realistic than ever. The decision by the extremist Israeli Government, together with the Israeli Knesset's rejection of any unilateral international recognition of an independent Palestinian State, constitutes a refusal to reach any political settlement with the Palestinian people that vouchsafes their just right to establish their own independent and sovereign State. The Arab Group therefore calls for the full support of the General Assembly in granting full membership at the United Nations to the State of Palestine as soon as possible, as an expression of the international community's serious and practical resolve to end the occupation and stop the conflict in the region.

The Arab Group stresses that just and comprehensive peace in the region, which is a strategic choice, is the only means of guaranteeing security and stability for the all the peoples of the Middle East and of protecting them from cycles of violence and war. That will not be possible without an end to the Israeli occupation and without the Palestinian people being able to enjoy their legitimate and inalienable right to establish their independent sovereign State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. Palestinians are entitled to enjoy security, peace and prosperity in their own State. Israel and the other countries in the region will not enjoy security and peace unless Palestinians enjoy them as well and regain what has been stolen from them. The continuation of the Israeli occupation is a threat to

security and stability in the region and to international peace and security.

In conclusion, Israeli massacres and crimes of genocide against the Palestinian people continue systematically and unabated. The most recent example of these was the heinous crime known as the flour massacre, which was committed last Thursday, resulting in more than 112 martyrs and some 750 injured, including women, children and older persons, who gathered around a convoy of humanitarian aid. The Security Council statement to the press on 2 March in that regard (SC/15608) bears clear witness to the gravity of the incident. In condemning the massacre in the strongest terms, the Arab Group calls for an independent, transparent investigation to be commenced and for the perpetrators to be held to account.

We reiterate our demand that the Security Council assume its duties and responsibilities in safeguarding international peace and security and that it move from words to action by immediately intervening and adopting an urgent resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, allowing aid to enter unhindered and preventing any attempts to forcibly displace civilians from Gaza.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Lambrinidis (European Union): I speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. We thank Algeria, which sought to find a compromise between the members of the Council.

Ending the civilian suffering and preventing further loss of life in Gaza is an absolute priority; too many lives have been lost already, and too many more are at stake. The European Union strongly supports the efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar aimed at reaching an agreement on the release of hostages and a temporary ceasefire, to ensure a sustained end to hostilities. We call on Hamas to immediately release all hostages without any precondition.

The European Union is gravely concerned with the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Immediate improvement of humanitarian access over land is key. We are very concerned about the humanitarian consequences, which must be avoided, of a possible ground operation in Rafah, where well over

a million Palestinians are currently sheltering from the fighting.

The European Union underlines that protection of all civilians and unhindered humanitarian access must be ensured by all parties at all times. There must be full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, by all sides. There must be accountability for violations of international law on all sides.

The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attacks by Hamas across Israel on 7 October 2023, which included sexual and gender-based violence. Israel has the right to defend itself; it must do so in line with international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. The European Union underlines again that military operations must be proportionate.

The European Union notes that the 26 January 2024 order of the International Court of Justice is legally binding on the parties and must be complied with. The European Union also calls for immediate implementation of Security Council resolutions 2720 (2023) and 2712 (2023). Rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is an obligation under international law.

Urgently needed aid must reach those in need through all means necessary, including humanitarian corridors and pauses for humanitarian needs or cessation of hostilities. The amount of humanitarian supplies entering Gaza remains wholly inadequate, and the number of trucks entering daily has decreased considerably. The European Union deplores the incident in northern Gaza on 29 February in which hundreds of people were reportedly killed or injured while seeking humanitarian assistance.

We deplore the deaths of an unprecedented number of United Nations staff, other humanitarian workers and journalists. There should be no doubt that the European Union will continue its strong support to the United Nations and other humanitarian actors in those circumstances. The European Commission will provide an additional €68 million to support the Palestinian people across the region in 2024 and will disburse €50 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) just this week. The European Union recognizes UNRWA's vital role in the humanitarian response in Gaza and the crucial one it plays for stability in the region.

The European Union calls on UNRWA to continue its cooperation in addressing the concerning and serious allegations that a few of its staff members were involved in the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. We welcome the Secretary-General's commencing internal and external investigations and UNRWA's commitment to taking immediate measures as needed depending on the results. We welcome in particular the appointment of an independent review group led by Catherine Colonna. The European Union calls upon all parties to cooperate fully and in good faith with those investigations.

Preventing further regional escalation remains crucial. The European Union supports all ongoing efforts towards de-escalation in the region. We are following with concern the situation across the Blue Line, and we recall the absolute necessity that all parties respect Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We support the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to which European Union member States are significant contributors, as a provider of stability.

The European Union fully supports the efforts of Special Envoy Grundberg in Yemen. The European Union condemns the Houthi attacks on commercial and naval vessels in the Red Sea. We call for the immediate implementation of Security Council resolution 2722 (2024), and in order to safeguard the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, we have launched the defensive maritime security operation, European Union Naval Force Aspides.

The European Union remains gravely concerned about the situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where settlement expansion and settler violence have reached record levels and where violent attacks by extremists on both sides are on the rise. Settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. Israel must stop settlement expansion and legalization, prevent settler violence, demolitions, evictions and forced transfers, and ensure that the perpetrators of crimes are held to account.

Ahead of Ramadan, Pesach and Easter, the European Union specifically underlines that the legal and historical status quo of the holy sites must be preserved in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's role as custodian. We call on everyone to exercise restraint and lower tensions in order to ensure the safety of all. Everyone should

refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric on the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Finally, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, and with Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. It is vital to restore a political horizon towards a two-State solution. The European Union is ready to contribute to reviving a political process, including through the Peace Day Effort, welcomes diplomatic peace and security initiatives and supports the holding of an international peace conference under United Nations auspices.

Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honour to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends for the Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, whose member States, despite the circumstances that have forced us to be gathered in this Hall today, appreciate the convening of this plenary meeting to hold a debate on a matter to which we all attach utmost importance and at a time of continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, which undoubtedly requires our collective attention and action, and which has regretfully been obstructed yet again by the exercise of the veto by a permanent member of the Security Council.

Although only a fraction of the decades of continued occupation and both systematic and brutal violence on the part of the occupying Power, it has now been almost five months since the beginning of this latest regrettable spiral of violence, death and destruction that has taken the lives of thousands of innocent civilians, particularly women and children, and over 150 United Nations personnel, as well as the destruction of hundreds of homes in the Gaza Strip and of all components of civilian life, in addition, if that were not enough, to the forcible displacement of over 85 per cent of the population. It has been five long and painful months in which the entire Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip has been living in a true hell on Earth, in the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations himself, because Israel has relentlessly bombarded Gaza by air, land and sea, and imposed an inhumane and crippling siege on them.

The figures from the war are dramatic, to say the least. The death toll just recently reached the 30,000, which is a figure that could be further quickly surpassed, should the occupying Power carry out its threat of deploying a military operation in Rafah. Needless to say, this war is possibly one of the deadliest and most destructive in history. Yet, despite the stark character of the images and the abundance of information on that brutal war, which, for the first time ever, is being transmitted live by its very victims, the Security Council continues to fail to fulfil its mandate of maintaining international peace and security, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations, owing to the lack of political will from at least one of its permanent members, which has obstructed once again the minimal, yet urgent, demand of the whole world: the call for an immediate ceasefire, that is, the demand for the only thing that will stop the bloodshed, the only thing that will stop the forced displacement and the only thing that will allow for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, including by ensuring the so urgently needed aid to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian conditions, including widespread hunger, disease and lack of safe shelter.

In that regard, we seize the opportunity, on one hand, to commend the effort and leadership of Algeria — a member of our Group of Friends — in defending the Palestinian cause within the Security Council and in responsibly carrying out its duties as a non-permanent member of that body, by submitting an action-oriented draft resolution (S/2024/173) aimed at nothing more than demanding “an immediate humanitarian ceasefire”, in full line with what the entire world is also demanding and for which hundreds of thousands of people are marching in the streets of various capitals around the world, and in this city last Saturday, and also in full conformity with the very provisions of resolution ES-10/22, overwhelmingly adopted by the membership of this very General Assembly (see A/ES-10/PV.45).

Now, on the other hand, we ought to sincerely regret the vote cast on 20 February 2024 by a permanent member of the Security Council against the draft (see S/PV.9552), as well as the excuses provided then and also just minutes ago in this Hall, which have once again prevented that body from effectively fulfilling its mandate and rising both to the historic moment and the expectations of the entire world. As a result, the Security Council continues today to fall far short of the demands made by the General Assembly, which,

as we all know, is the most representative organ of the United Nations.

As noted by the Secretary-General just a couple of weeks ago, during the briefing held in the Hall on his priorities for 2024 (see A/78/PV.54), the United Nations must recover its *raison d'être*, which is nothing less than the ongoing quest for peace. We therefore need to make bold moves to that end in order, once and for all, to give peace a chance. We need to act in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and in line with the most basic tenets of international law, and we need to do it now, for the sake of humankind and in order to avert further loss of human life, including by preventing a widespread famine that is already being felt on the ground, as has been noted by various experts. We need to change the path we are on, and we need to do it now. In that context, we note that famine must never be used as a method of warfare.

We therefore need to continue to push for peace around the world, including in the occupied Palestinian territory, and especially in Gaza, where Palestinian civilians have been enduring, for far too long, not only an inhumane blockade, but more than 75 years of Nakba and a colonial and illegal occupation, together with continuous military aggression that has now been turned into real carnage.

An initial step towards rectifying that historical injustice and achieving peace would be, precisely, to bring about a much needed and fully respected ceasefire that puts an immediate end to the ongoing indiscriminate bombing against all civilians and the civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip in complete disregard for the provisions of international humanitarian law, for which it is also equally necessary to halt the transfer of any means for further perpetuating the brutal military aggression. We are confident that that would not only create the conditions necessary for building a sustainable peace, but it would also facilitate the work of humanitarian actors on the ground, including the entry of desperately needed aid, in particular lifesaving supplies.

In that regard, we also take this opportunity to call for enhanced support for humanitarian efforts aimed at providing assistance to the Palestinian people, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which remains a lifeline for Palestine refugees and has played, particularly in these horrific months, and historically,

an indispensable humanitarian role on the ground, as has been recognized repeatedly by the General Assembly itself. Deliberately depriving UNRWA of funds will only further imperil the lives of Palestine refugees and displaced civilians in desperate need of all possible assistance and support. Such rash actions by donor countries also violate prior commitments made in that regard.

Moreover, and in the light of reports recently issued by some non-governmental organizations and other relevant actors on the ground concerning Israel preventing aid from entering Gaza, we renew our call for all efforts to be made to ensure unimpeded, consistent, safe humanitarian access made to scale, in order to meet the urgent needs on the ground. It goes without saying that that is key to avoiding the total collapse of critical civilian infrastructure, which would inevitably lead to more civilian casualties, widespread hunger, disease and poverty, and would bring about even greater human suffering and despair. If that were to occur it would ultimately only further deepen the humanitarian crisis and worsen the already catastrophic situation in Gaza, where half of the civilian population comprises children and Palestinian refugees, over 85 per cent of whom have now been internally displaced.

We underscore that Israel, the occupying Power, must fully respect and abide by the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024, that is, over a month ago — a month in which, regretfully, we have seen no change in behaviour, but rather a pattern of continued and systematic worsening of the situation. Neither have we seen in the past month a reduction in the number of casualties or attacks against civilians, nor an increase in access for humanitarian aid, much less the bringing of charges against public officials who incite others to commit the acts covered by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide — quite the opposite.

In that context, we stress the importance of avoiding selectivity or double standards when it comes to applying international law and other legally binding obligations; otherwise, the aggressor would only be emboldened to commit, *inter alia*, further crimes or escalate violence or commit further mass violations of human rights. We emphasize in that regard that it is our shared responsibility to prevent the further prolongation of the prevailing cycle of impunity.

Similarly, we also call for the adoption of urgent measures aimed, on one hand, at ensuring the safety and well-being of all civilians, and, on the other, at facilitating the provision of international protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, on the basis of relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

Looking ahead, and with the intention of ensuring that a political horizon remains in place for the achievement of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, we express our full support for any initiative aimed at addressing, *inter alia*, the question of the membership of the State of Palestine at the United Nations, so that it can finally be admitted as a full Member of the Organization. We trust that the Security Council will shoulder its responsibilities, at least in that regard, should it be serious about its commitment to the two-State solution and the implementation of its over 90 resolutions on the question.

The Group of Friends for the Defence of the Charter of the United Nations reaffirms its firm commitment to the just cause of Palestine, as well as its unwavering solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people in their ongoing struggle to achieve their inalienable rights, including to self-determination, independence and freedom. We further reaffirm our full and continued support for all efforts aimed at ending the grave injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people since the 1948 Nakba. Similarly, we remain firmly committed to redoubling our efforts, including through our active engagement on all international initiatives aimed at ending the illegal Israeli occupation and at achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the pre-1967 borders.

In conclusion, while reaffirming our full commitment to preserving, promoting and defending the prevalence and validity of the Charter of the United Nations, we stress once again that a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including for the plight of the Palestinian refugees and their right of return, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the founding Charter of the Organization, can only be achieved by peaceful means, and therefore call for urgent efforts to address the root causes of that protracted and tragic conflict, which has

years of occupation and the subsequent consequences at its core, and to ensure accountability.

Briefly, and in our national capacity, we would just like to make two observations. First, it is clear that the Israeli regime no longer answers in any way to Washington and is emboldened as never before, owing to the environment of impunity facilitated for years by its most loyal partner, which still insists on attempting to deceive us, insinuating that conclusive and necessary action by the Security Council might torpedo current bilateral efforts to achieve a ceasefire. We insist therefore that it is clear that the Israeli regime has no intention of ending the current genocide, as can be seen from, among other things, its refusal to allow, once again, its most loyal ally, which for years has provided the resources and means to conduct its aggression against the entire Palestinian people, to bring in humanitarian aid to save lives in Gaza. That, among so many other things, confirms the cynical complicity of the United States in the genocide, which today is being committed with impunity before the eyes of the entire international community, even in such events as the one that occurred on 29 February 2024, when, only a few days ago, more than 100 people were brutally murdered while they were waiting for food in Gaza.

Secondly, the moment has come for the General Assembly to assume once and for all its responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security and for it to adopt a resolution authorizing the necessary deployment of an international protection force with a mandate to ensure the protection of and right to life of the Palestinian people, who today are to be wiped off the face of the earth, as was so blatantly stated by senior officials of the Israeli regime itself.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela concludes by demanding that the United States Government put an end to its excuses and to so much indifference.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I have the honour to present this statement on behalf of the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in my capacity as the acting Chair of the Group. Let me express our appreciation for the convening of today's meeting of the General Assembly on the current situation in Palestine, with particular reference to the Gaza Strip. Today's meeting is taking place because of the unfortunate use of the veto on 20 February 2024 by the United States of America, as a permanent member of the Security Council, during the Council's debate

held under the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine (see S/PV.9552).

It is deeply regrettable that the Security Council has failed, once again, to assume its primary responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to halt the atrocities perpetrated against the Palestinian people in Gaza by the Israeli occupying Power. That failure has no doubt reflected negatively on the primary role of the Security Council, the principal organ of the United Nations with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is obvious that since the launch of the aggression on Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine, nearly five months ago, the entire world has continued to follow, with growing despair and anger, the monumental and unending suffering imposed on the Palestinian people there. The situation has resulted in a colossal loss of lives and wanton destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and religious sites in Gaza, owing to the incessant attacks by the Israeli occupying Power on the territory.

The number of human casualties resulting from the Israeli aggression on Gaza has continued to grow, owing to the recent bombardment of the city of Deir El-Balah in Gaza. According to the OIC Observatory for Israeli Crimes and Violations against Palestinians, a total number of 690 deaths were recorded during the week of 20 to 26 February 2024, while over 1,057 persons sustained injuries. It is on record that since the beginning of the aggression on Gaza on 7 October 2023, the total number of persons killed or massacred rose to 29,700, some 70 per cent of whom were women and children. More than 12,500 were children.

I would like to add that we strongly condemn the carnage wreaked by Israel's occupation forces on unarmed Palestinians awaiting a life-saving aid and food delivery in Gaza on 29 February. That is another manifestation of Israel's pervasive and continuous violations of international humanitarian law.

It is rather unfortunate, to say the least, that the various efforts deployed by the international community to end this catastrophic humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip have not yet yielded positive results. It is in that context that we welcome the President of the General Assembly's timely initiatives to resume the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which led to the adoption of the

two resolutions, dated 27 October and 12 December 2023, respectively (resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22). Those resolutions, among other provisions, called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, while demanding that all parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians.

In the same vein, we take the opportunity to commend the Secretary-General for taking the historic initiative of to invoke the provisions of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations on 6 December 2023, in drawing attention of the Security Council to the urgent need for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. That singular action was indeed a declaration of the dangers to the maintenance of international peace and security posed by the continued war in Gaza.

The foregoing calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza were not limited to the forums of the United Nations. We have cause before the General Assembly to recall the resolution of the Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit on Israeli Aggression against the Palestinian People, held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on 11 November 2023 (S/2023/885, annex). This resolution called for an urgent and concerted global action to resolve the lingering question of Palestine, and, in that regard, the Summit called for breaking the siege on Gaza, the cessation of armed aggression by Israel, the condemnation of attacks on and the targeting of civilians, the attacks on and demolition and destruction of hospitals, religious and cultural sites, as they constitute acts of impunity, violations of international law, and war crimes and atrocities.

Notwithstanding the foregoing efforts by the various actors within the United Nations as well as by members of the international community, there are ominous signs of even greater danger ahead. In view of the report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on the impact of Israel's recent calls to dismantle the Agency and for donors to freeze their funding to it, there is an imminent threat of mass starvation in the Gaza Strip, owing to the inadequate food supplies and lack of essential services for the teeming number of Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory. Accordingly, the current session of the General Assembly should take concrete measures to ensure the realization of the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

There is indeed a golden opportunity for the General Assembly to give expression to the dominant views of its Member States, and the world public opinion at large, on the need for decisive action to halt the bloodshed and carnage to which Gaza is being subjected. In that regard, we commend the position adopted by the Joint Arab Islamic Summit for the Assembly's consideration in this meeting. States Members of the United Nations should exert diplomatic, political and legal pressure on the Israeli occupation authorities to stop its crimes against humanity and deter further aggression.

Additionally, in order to give effect to the relevant United Nations resolutions on the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination within the context of a two-State solution, we call for the convening of an international peace conference on Palestine to be convened on the basis of agreed principles under international law.

In conclusion, the international community should uphold its responsibility for halting the Israeli aggression on Gaza immediately. The world should support the Palestinian people in achieving their right to self-determination and establish their sovereign and independent State on their territory, occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 elected members of the Security Council (E10), namely, Algeria, Ecuador, Guyana, Japan, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland and my own country, Malta.

I begin by extending our thanks and appreciation to Algeria for its constructive approach as penholder on draft resolution S/2024/173, and for its constant engagement with all Council members during the negotiations. The result was a carefully crafted text addressing the situation on the ground in a comprehensive manner, and all E10 countries voted in favour.

Among other things, the draft resolution submitted called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access into and throughout the Gaza Strip, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and full compliance with international law. Furthermore, it deplored all acts of terrorism and all attacks against civilians and civilian

infrastructure. It rejected the forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children. We therefore deeply regret that the text was vetoed (see S/PV.9552). As elected members, we firmly believe that the Council has the duty and responsibility to act decisively when faced with such situations.

The E10 remains gravely concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the entire population is facing food insecurity. Six hundred thousand people are on the brink of famine. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has a central role to play in ensuring an effective humanitarian response, and its staff has continued to play that role even under life-threatening conditions. The civilian population is facing extreme and unbearable hardships, which will only continue to grow because of ongoing hostilities. Women and children are suffering in a disproportionate manner. Social services have collapsed. Furthermore, we are alarmed at Israel's intention to launch a ground offensive into Rafah, which will further compound this untenable crisis. The consequences for civilians would be devastating. Ensuring the full and urgent implementation of Security Council resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) is now more pressing than ever. Additionally, the order on provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024 must be fully respected and complied with.

We emphasize the fact that the protection of civilians is of paramount importance. All parties must comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. All allegations of violations must be effectively investigated with independence and impartiality.

In conclusion, the E10 countries reiterate their unwavering commitment to the vision of a two-State solution where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders, consistent with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. An immediate humanitarian ceasefire must be the first step in that direction.

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

Malta regrets the circumstances that demand the convening of today's debate. Malta voted in favour of the Algerian draft Security Council resolution calling

for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. We thank Algeria for its approach as penholder and for its efforts to generate agreement on a much-needed text.

Malta has repeatedly and unequivocally condemned the Hamas terror attack of 7 October 2023 and subsequent rocket fire into Israel. We reiterate that the immediate and unconditional release of hostages must be a top priority. I would remind the Assembly that the Security Council has already passed two resolutions calling for the release of hostages (resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023)). Therefore, claims that the Security Council is not acting on their behalf are inaccurate. However, the scale of human suffering that continues to unfold in Gaza leads to only one conclusion: the Security Council must call for an end to the conflict. Regrettably, so far it has not been able to do so. As a consequence, we have witnessed increasingly horrific scenes of human tragedy, such as the recent incident in the south-west of Gaza City, where more than 100 people were reportedly killed or injured while seeking life-saving aid.

We unequivocally reiterate our call for a permanent ceasefire. That is essential to alleviating the suffering of civilians in Gaza, de-escalating broader regional tensions and providing the framework for the delivery of the humanitarian aid needed by the civilians in Gaza.

As we hold this debate, the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza continues to unfold. Some 30,000 Palestinians have been killed. Too many are suffering from catastrophic hunger and the outbreak of disease. International humanitarian law and the laws of war must be respected by all parties. Military action during hostilities must always be in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality and necessity. Parties are also obliged to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected. Unhindered humanitarian aid and the safety of United Nations and other humanitarian workers must be guaranteed. The full implementation of Security Council resolutions 2712 (2013) and 2720 (2013) remains ever more pressing.

At a time when Israel must facilitate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance and food aid into Gaza, we remain deeply concerned about the prospect that the Israeli military may extend its campaign into Rafah. The consequences of such a decision would be catastrophic. The area designated as a safe zone is sheltering half the population of the Strip, including over 600,000 children and their families. We also

call for the immediate implementation of the order of provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024.

In conclusion, Malta reiterates its commitment to the realization of a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States, living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Sitaldin (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Larsen (Australia): I deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia (CANZ).

I thank the President for convening today's meeting.

As CANZ countries have often affirmed, we see the veto initiative as a key plank in Security Council transparency and accountability. We thank the United States for its explanation of the use of the veto on 20 February 2024 (see S/PV.9552). CANZ countries encourage the Security Council to continue to look for a way to take further meaningful action on this important issue.

CANZ countries are deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. As members of the General Assembly know, we have unequivocally condemned the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks that saw the killing of 1,200 Israelis, and we have called repeatedly for the immediate release of all hostages. We have also stressed that Palestinians cannot be made to pay the price of defeating Hamas. Around 1.7 million Palestinians are currently displaced, and approximately 30,000 have been killed. The protection of civilians is paramount and a requirement under international humanitarian law. We reiterate our calls for safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access into Gaza.

We are gravely concerned by indications of a proposed ground offensive into Rafah. Such an operation would be catastrophic: it would endanger the lives of the many civilians sheltering there. We repeat our message to Israel: do not go down that path. We expect Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice's ruling on provisional measures, including to enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance. We oppose any forcible displacement of Palestinians from Gaza, the reoccupation of Gaza and any reduction in its territory.

CANZ countries welcome the efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States to mediate a pause in hostilities. We urge both parties to urgently reach an agreement. As the Assembly knows, CANZ countries have called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. We see that as a critical step towards a permanent and sustainable ceasefire. But such a ceasefire cannot be one-sided. Hamas must release all hostages, lay down its arms and stop using Palestinians as human shields.

Ultimately, a negotiated political solution is needed to achieve a better future for both Israelis and Palestinians. CANZ countries support Palestinian aspirations for self-determination and remain steadfast in their commitment to a two-State solution in which Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side, in peace, security and dignity.

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): My delegation thanks the President for convening today's plenary meeting following the veto cast by a permanent member of the Security Council at its meeting on 20 February 2024 held under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (see S/PV.9552). We align ourselves with the statement of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of Pakistan.

Malaysia profoundly regrets the exercise of the veto, which prevented the Security Council from adopting a crucial draft resolution presented by Algeria (S/2024/173). The text demanded, inter alia, an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, rejected the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians and called for full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. Support for the text by 13 members of the Council clearly showed that there was agreement among a large majority thereof. Alas, that clarion call by the majority of the members of the Council as well as the General Assembly was not heeded.

The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The ruthless war that has been waged in Gaza for 150 days now has proved beyond a doubt to be a grave threat to international peace and security. However, the Council's continued paralysis prevents it from discharging its mandate and has allowed the carnage and collective punishment of Palestinian civilians, women and children alike, to persist.

The death toll in Gaza is beyond appalling: women, children, humanitarian and health workers,

journalists and media personnel, and United Nations staff, have all fallen victim to the barbarism of Israel. The humanitarian situation has long been described as dire, as the delivery of aid supplies continues to be denied or severely impeded. Bombardments persist incessantly in all parts of the Gaza Strip. For months, we have heard repeatedly from United Nations staff and international aid workers that nowhere is safe in Gaza. Last Thursday, we witnessed the killing of more than 100 innocent hungry civilians, waiting for a long-overdue food-aid delivery. How many more innocent people must die before those who oppose a ceasefire in Gaza finally see that enough is enough?

Israel has brazenly violated every facet of international law with utter impunity, especially international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Israel disregards its duty to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Security Council resolutions and the order of provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice are blatantly cast aside. Israel continues to trample the rule of law, confident that it will not be held to account for its belligerence, so long as it enjoys the patronage of a permanent member of the Security Council. The impunity enjoyed by Israel challenges the legitimacy of international law. It undermines efforts towards a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict and further derails the realization of a two-State solution.

It is time for the aggressor to be compelled to abide by the rule of law. First, States should immediately halt the sale and supply of arms and ammunition to Israel. Secondly, financial support for Israel continuing this horrific aggression must be stopped now. Thirdly, punitive measures, such as sanctions, visa denials and travel restrictions, should be imposed on members of the settler communities, so as to hold them accountable for their illegal actions and reprehensible violence.

Malaysia categorically rejects and condemns plans to resettle Palestinians out of Gaza proposed by some Israeli ministers and lawmakers, as well as the recent decision of the Israeli Knesset to deny the Palestinian people their inalienable right to self-determination. Forced displacement is a clear violation of international law. Such resettlement measures, which are akin to ethnic cleansing, must not be allowed to occur. We join other States Members of the United Nations in calling on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council must act swiftly, responsibly and decisively

to stop Israel's unlawful collective punishment of Palestinians. We firmly believe that bilateral or regional diplomatic efforts complement actions of the Council and reject the argument that Council action will undermine such efforts.

We reaffirm our utmost support for full membership of Palestine in the United Nations. It is high time that we realize that such recognition is long overdue.

A humanitarian ceasefire was needed months ago. Thousands of lives could have been saved had a permanent member of the Security Council not defied the call of the overwhelming majority and provided Israel with cover for persisting in its mass atrocities, collectively punishing the population of Gaza as a whole. Opposing such a ceasefire simply means one thing: complicity in the ongoing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The veto and its undemocratic nature runs against the very principles that the United Nations was built upon. It has no place in the modern democratic multilateral architecture. Malaysia maintains its position that the exercise of the veto by permanent members of the Security Council should be regulated to deter its unjustifiable use or abuse. Its application must be prohibited in situations involving mass atrocity crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. We are also of the view that for the veto to be used effectively and more accountably, it should be exercised by at least two of the five permanent members and supported by three non-permanent members of the Council. The decision to use the veto must then be supported by the General Assembly with a simple majority vote. Malaysia will continue to work constructively with other Member States through the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform with a view to improving the United Nations, so as to make it more efficient, open, transparent and inclusive.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): The civilian suffering in Gaza cannot continue. Hunger has reached devastating levels. Disease is on the rise. People are crammed into ever smaller slivers of land, with nowhere left to go. Last week, the United Kingdom and Jordan air-dropped four tons of life-saving aid to the Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in northern Gaza. We also announced an additional \$5.4 million in aid to ensure the United Nations Population Fund can continue

to provide life-saving support to more than 100,000 vulnerable women and girls in Gaza.

As my Prime Minister has told Prime Minister Netanyahu and regional leaders, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. Over half of Gaza's population is sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensuring that aid can reach the people who so desperately need it.

The deaths of people in Gaza waiting for an aid convoy last week were horrific. There must be an urgent investigation, and the responsible parties must be held to account. Such an occurrence must not happen again. We cannot separate what happened from the inadequate supplies of aid. In February, only half the number of trucks crossed into Gaza that crossed in January. That is simply unconscionable.

Israel has an obligation to ensure that significantly more humanitarian aid reaches the people of Gaza. We have identified a series of bottlenecks that need addressing: Israel must urgently open more crossings into Gaza, eliminate bureaucratic obstacles, enable aid operations in Gaza and ensure there is a robust de-confliction mechanism in place to protect ordinary Palestinians, non-governmental organizations, medical staff and others providing aid. This latest tragedy serves only to underscore the importance of securing an immediate end to the fighting, leading to a permanent and sustainable ceasefire.

The negotiations led by Egypt, Qatar and the United States are the only way to get life-saving aid in at the scale needed and to free the hostages currently held by Hamas. Such a deal would offer the basis from which to achieve a sustainable ceasefire and lasting peace. The elements essential to achieving that are, first, the release of all hostages; secondly, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; thirdly, Hamas being stripped of its capability to launch attacks against Israel; fourthly, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; fifthly, and finally, the establishment of a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-State solution, with a clear commitment to granting Palestine recognition, including at the United Nations.

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully supports the statement made by the observer of the European Union and takes this opportunity to reinforce the following points.

Since the terrible attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the resulting military escalation, almost 30,000 people have lost their lives in Gaza. The suffering endured by the civilian population is unspeakable. More than 75 per cent of the Gazan population has been displaced, often several times. Civil order has been destroyed. The health system is collapsing. Famine threatens. Basic infrastructure has been destroyed. A million children are facing daily trauma. And let us not forget the fate of the Israeli hostages torn from their families and held since 7 October in the midst of that battlefield, that field of ruins. The humanitarian response itself is running out of steam.

Any escalation at Rafah or elsewhere that jeopardizes regional stability must stop. In these circumstances, my country, Belgium, deplors the inability of the Security Council to adopt a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

In all circumstances and in any conflict, whether in Gaza, Ukraine or elsewhere in the world, Belgium defends the same principles: respect for the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and respect for international humanitarian law by all parties. The same applies to the Fourth Geneva Convention, protecting civilians.

Belgium is particularly concerned about the fate of children killed, wounded and separated from their parents. The horrors of war will have a psychological impact on the ones who live for years to come. All forms of violation of their rights must be stopped. Kidnapped children must be released immediately and unconditionally. All parties must work, without further delay, to implement Security Council resolution 2712 (2023).

Belgium has condemned in the strongest possible terms the acts of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas terrorists and has called for those crimes to be fully investigated. Today independent United Nations experts are also reporting serious allegations of human rights violations of which Palestinian women and girls are allegedly victim in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, is unacceptable, everywhere, always.

In the face of repeated violations of international law, Belgium calls for accountability and for those responsible for the most serious crimes to be prosecuted by the competent national courts or, failing that, by the International Criminal Court. In that respect, Belgium welcomes the recent clarifications provided by Prosecutor Khan with regard to the actions that could be taken by his Office.

In view of the humanitarian emergency, Belgium is calling for an immediate ceasefire respected by all parties, making possible thereby the implementation of Security Council resolution 2720 (2023). We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. We call for the implementation of the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice, including that Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the urgent provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to the population of Gaza. It is imperative that permanent and unhindered humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip be allowed and that the conditions enabling humanitarian actors to distribute aid on the ground be created.

In conclusion, the fight against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other violent terrorist and extremist groups will be all the more effective if it is accompanied by a political horizon offering security guarantees to Israel, while responding to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination. Those objectives are not mutually exclusive, quite the contrary. For that reason, Belgium supports a two-State political solution. Belgium welcomes the Secretary-General's calls to lay the foundations for concrete and irreversible action to that end. Belgium also fully supports the organization of a preparatory peace conference, as proposed by the European Union, in conjunction with the peace effort initiated by the European Union, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Restoring a political horizon through a two-State political solution is the only way to guarantee lasting peace and combat extremism.

Mr. McBean (Ireland): I thank the President for convening today's important meeting on the veto initiative.

Ireland deeply regrets the veto exercised on 20 February 2024, the fifth veto used since 7 October 2023, and the long list of vetoes on the Palestinian question since 1946.

This war must end. There is no room for ambiguity about the urgency of a ceasefire in Gaza, and the

unconditional and immediate release of hostages held by Hamas is an imperative. Nor is there any room for ambiguity about the necessity of unhindered humanitarian access. For months now, those have been Ireland's demands.

It is a sobering reality that a humanitarian catastrophe of massive proportions is unfolding in Gaza. A human-made conflict-induced famine now looms larger on the horizon with every passing day. A military escalation in Rafah, where almost 1.5 million desperate people are taking shelter, casts a dark shadow. Such an escalation would have devastating consequences. It can and must be avoided. An immediate ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access are a human imperative.

The Charter confers primary responsibility for international peace and security on the Security Council. At a time when the Council is so often paralysed by politics, paralysed by the use or threat of the veto, paralysed by an inability to move with the times and reform, it is incumbent on the membership in the General Assembly to remember that the Charter does not confer on the Security Council exclusive responsibility for peace and security.

The Secretary-General has a significant role. We saw that when he invoked Article 99 of the Charter to sound the alarm about this brutal war. However, it is in the General Assembly, which has an important and complementary role, where the true weight of global opinion can be expressed. Last December, the Assembly voted to demand an immediate humanitarian ceasefire (resolution ES-10/22). For 153 Member States, the vast majority of the Assembly, there was no equivocation: an immediate ceasefire was our clear demand.

When the General Assembly last renewed the vital mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in December 2022, 157 Member States voted in favour, affirming the necessity of the continuation of UNRWA's work (resolution 77/123). In our view, UNRWA remains today as essential as ever: the backbone of a life-saving humanitarian response in Gaza and a pillar of regional stability.

Wars have rules. In this conflict, it is Ireland's assessment that those rules have been broken. The attacks launched by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023 were reprehensible. However, international law limits the use of force in self-defence to no more than what is necessary and proportionate. Our view for

some time now is that Israel has exceeded those limits. International humanitarian law requires respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

We once again underline our serious concern that Israel's use of heavy munitions with a wide blast area is indiscriminate. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has a devastating impact on civilians. The damage to and destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, energy, food, water and sanitation systems, further aggravates civilian suffering.

Ireland is also increasingly concerned by Israel's failure to ensure essential supplies for Gaza's civilian population and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. That appears to us to be in violation of international humanitarian law. It is vital that the international community ensures accountability, whether at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court or elsewhere.

Sanctions against Hamas are an appropriate response to its crimes, and so too are sanctions against violent settlers in the West Bank. The current cataclysm in Gaza is but the latest corrosive cycle of violence in the conflict. History is replete with so many chapters on the Palestinian question and the Middle East peace process. No matter how far away peace feels right now, we, the international community, must more than ever redouble our efforts to finally write a new chapter. A political settlement in this long conflict must finally be secured. A ceasefire is urgent right now. But a ceasefire alone is not sufficient to end decades of conflict.

We cannot lose sight of the bigger picture — the enduring need for a comprehensive political track leading to a Palestinian State. We await the finalization of the Arab peace plan and urge all States to unite around a common vision. Palestinian self-determination along with peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians can wait no longer.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): As far as India is concerned, the conflict in Gaza that has been raging for nearly five months now is deeply troubling. The humanitarian crisis has deepened, and the region and beyond have seen rising instability. India's position on the conflict has been clear, having been stated on several occasions by our leadership. There are four key points in that regard.

First, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has led to a large-scale loss of civilian lives, especially of women and children. As I have mentioned

before, it has also resulted in an alarming humanitarian crisis. That is simply unacceptable. We have strongly condemned the deaths of civilians in the conflict. It is critical to prevent a further escalation of violence and hostilities. It is also imperative to avoid the loss of civilian lives in any conflict situation. International law and international humanitarian law must be respected under all circumstances.

Secondly, we are cognizant of the fact that the immediate trigger of the conflict was the terror attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023, which were shocking and deserve our unequivocal condemnation. India has a long-standing and uncompromising position against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. There can be no justification for terrorism and hostage-taking. Accordingly, we demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Thirdly, it is imperative that humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza be immediately scaled up to avert a further deterioration of the situation. We urge all parties to come together in that endeavour. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations and the international community in that regard. India has provided humanitarian aid to the people of Palestine and will continue to do so.

Fourthly, as my leadership has repeatedly emphasized, only a two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations between both sides on final status issues, will deliver an enduring peace. India is committed to supporting a two-State solution in which the Palestinian people are able to live freely in an independent country within secure borders, with due regard to the security needs of Israel.

In conclusion, in order to arrive at a lasting solution, we urge immediate de-escalation, an eschewing of violence, the release of all hostages, the avoidance of provocative and escalatory actions, and efforts to create conditions for an early resumption of direct peace negotiations.

Mr. Gafoor (Singapore): We thank the President for convening today's debate on the use of the veto, under plenary agenda item 63. We very much regret that we are meeting for the second time this year under this agenda item, to discuss yet another veto cast by a permanent member of the Security Council. Singapore aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Liechtenstein on behalf of a group

of countries and would like to make the following additional points in its national capacity.

We are disappointed that the Security Council was again unable to reach agreement on an urgently needed response to the conflict in Gaza. The Council's inability to find a diplomatic solution may mean even more dire consequences for the population of Gaza, over 30,000 of whom have reportedly been killed. We have condemned the horrific acts of terror by Hamas on 7 October 2023. We have demanded, and continue to demand, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Meanwhile, the human costs of the Gaza crisis continue to escalate, and tensions elsewhere in the Middle East are growing. This conflict could expand to the wider region. The Security Council, which has been charged with the responsibility of maintaining peace and security, must not remain paralysed by inaction in the face of this grave crisis.

We are particularly concerned that the veto was used to block draft resolution S/2024/173 demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages (see S/PV.9552). Those are all actions that the General Assembly has supported with an overwhelming majority, as reflected in the 153 votes in favour of the resolution ES-10/22, entitled "Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations", adopted by the General Assembly at its special session on 12 December 2023 (see A/ES-10/PV.45). We are therefore glad that the veto initiative provides this important opportunity to hear directly from Security Council members on how the Council envisages achieving those humanitarian goals.

We thank Algeria, the proponent of the draft resolution, for its tireless efforts aimed at seeking a solution to the crisis and in presenting a draft that sought to garner the widest possible consensus. We also take this opportunity to commend the vital assistance being provided by many United Nations agencies under extremely difficult circumstances. Singapore has also provided humanitarian assistance to the affected population in Gaza.

The catastrophic situation in Gaza demands urgent action. We therefore reiterate the urgent call contained in resolution ES-10/22 for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, and we urge all States Members of the United Nations, and all permanent members of the Security

Council, to avoid politicizing this tragedy. We also call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to take the initiative and embark on the difficult but necessary steps to end the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A negotiated two-State solution in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions is the only viable basis for a durable, just and comprehensive solution that will allow both Palestinians and Israelis to live in the peace, security and dignity that they both deserve.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): A few days ago, the international community witnessed once again another unjustifiable and cruel use of the veto power by the United States, during the vote on draft resolution S/2024/173 submitted by Algeria calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Despite receiving widespread support from Member States and nations globally, the United States shamefully wielded its veto power against the draft resolution. The actions of the United States Administration in that regard will undoubtedly be scrutinized by both nations and history alike.

Iran commends the invaluable efforts and unwavering dedication of Algeria within the Security Council, particularly in addressing the ongoing situation in Gaza. We commend its initiative in submitting a robust draft resolution aimed at achieving a long-awaited ceasefire. We express our gratitude to the 13 Council members that voted in favour of the draft resolution, thereby supporting a ceasefire in Gaza.

The gravity of the situation in Gaza has garnered widespread attention within the international community. The Israeli authorities are using starvation as a deliberate method of war against the civilian population in Gaza. Regrettably, the Council's silence has become a licence to starve and kill the Palestinian population. Moreover, the international community is deeply alarmed by the Israeli decision to invade Rafah, as it foresees dire consequences for that densely populated region. Additionally, the Israeli regime's actions in Lebanon and Syria, which contravene international law and the Charter of the United Nations, have further exacerbated tensions and raised concerns about destabilization in the region.

We strongly condemn the most recent brutal attack of the Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians seeking humanitarian aid. The deliberate firing in that attack resulted in at least 117 civilians killed and approximately 750 others wounded. All that cruelty has

occurred in the absence of the ceasefire called for in draft resolution S/2024/173.

We shall now specifically address the obstacle that the world has witnessed, which prevented attempts by the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities, calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the occupied Palestinian territory.

It is regrettable that the United States has decided to turn a blind eye to reality and vehemently supports the ongoing genocide by Israel. The United States even ignores loud calls from its own people. A self-immolation incident that occurred in Washington, D.C. last week, committed by a 25-year-old active-duty United States airman, Aaron Bushnell, shows how the conscience of the people of the world has been deeply wounded by the scale of the violence against Palestinians, and how American people are desperately ashamed of their Government's policies.

The United States obstruction of the Council's duties under the Charter starkly contrasts with global appeals for an end to the bloodshed, defies the inherent human instinct to preserve life and violates fundamental principles of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Inadmissible claims by the United States authorities to justify wrongful acts as self-defence, despite their illegitimacy, exempt Israel from adhering to the most basic values of humanity, principles of international law and the compelling rules of international law that protect women, children and unarmed civilians during war, and grant the Israeli war machine impunity to continue its assault on Palestinian civilians.

We once again reiterate our call for an urgent and sustainable ceasefire, without which the tragedy will worsen, leading to the loss of innocent lives, including women and children. The swift implementation of a ceasefire to prevent widespread starvation in Gaza is of paramount importance.

We must reiterate the urgency of fulfilling obligations under international humanitarian law and the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024. Those measures are imperative to ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, considering the Security Council's current impasse, I wish to emphasize the obligations of third parties under international law, as outlined in

the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice. All Member States are not only required to refrain from recognizing or assisting the Israeli regime in its pursuit of genocide but are also obligated to take required steps to prevent such war crimes and acts of genocide from taking place. We therefore urge the international community and all sovereign States to implement the measures necessary to compel Israel to cease its genocidal war and aggression against the Palestinian people. Those measures may include the imposition of collective and individual economic sanctions. Furthermore, the international community must pressure the Israeli regime into halting its violations and assuming its international obligations.

Mr. Sahraoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly, the world's parliament, which expresses the will of all States Members of the United Nations and of free peoples, has been convened following the use of the veto against draft resolution S/2024/173 submitted by my country's delegation to the Security Council (see S/PV.9552).

Based on the instructions of the highest authorities in Algeria, in consultation and coordination with the Group of Arab States in New York, the draft resolution was clear in its demand and intention, in line with the call of millions of people around the world for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. That demand is of extreme importance and should be heeded so that the Security Council may adopt it, preserve the credibility of the United Nations and safeguard the what little humanity remains in this world. This humanity is diminishing with every day that there is hunger in Gaza, with every mother's tear shed for her dead baby, with the pain of every father for the loss of his child in Gaza.

During the negotiation process on draft resolution S/2024/173, we tried to take into consideration proposals made by numerous countries until we arrived at a text that was intended to garner the support of all Member States. However, unfortunately, the draft resolution's adoption was hampered by a Council member's exercise of the veto.

Rejecting the demand to stop hostilities in the Gaza Strip is totally unjustified and has increased the suffering of the Palestinians. The Al-Rashid Street massacre is but one example of that. The ongoing killing of Palestinians has impeded the international community's ability to provide aid in a timely manner. Further, reports indicate that the amount of aid has

been reduced by half this month, which confirms that the limitations in the impact of resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) must be overcome. The reports show that the Secretary-General was right when, in a press briefing, he stated that “a humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to begin to meet the desperate needs of people in Gaza”.

The Security Council cannot be the sole entity not to call for a ceasefire. It must impose a ceasefire without delay; otherwise, there will be nothing left in Gaza to make life for its people worthwhile.

For five months, human flesh in the Gaza Strip has been ripped apart by missiles. Because the Gaza Strip is ugly in the eyes of the occupying Power, it has been bombarded from all sides as collective punishment for the Palestinians. Undoubtedly, the situation will deteriorate further once the occupier invades Rafah. Therefore, we warn against such plans and reiterate the need to put an end to them.

The situation in Gaza has become unbearable, and the Palestinian people therein have unfortunately the option of either to quickly dying by lethal weapons, which need to be stopped being provided to the occupier, or to slowly die of starvation and disease. That situation requires the immediate lifting of the siege and delivering to the people their basic needs to survive. The catastrophic situation that we have reached today is the result of the intransigence of the occupier and the preferential treatment by the international community. The occupying Power thinks that it is above the law and accountability.

The situation requires serious consideration because what we see today in Gaza will have repercussions and will give rise to a new form of conflict in which people forget everything about their humanity and ethical values. We are witnessing horrific images that we thought had long disappeared from our world. Therefore we, the peoples of the United Nations, who have pledged to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, need to act swiftly and impose a ceasefire out of our conviction in basic human rights, the dignity of individuals and the equal rights of men, women and nations large and small.

We stress that the only solution to the Palestinian question involves empowering Palestinians to enjoy their legitimate rights, particularly the rights to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian State. That is the option agreed to by the

international community, and which must be defended against the existential threat posed by the occupation authorities. Implementing that option will be possible only if full membership is granted to the State of Palestine at the United Nations. Accordingly, we reaffirm Algeria's commitment, as expressed by the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmajid Tebboune, to work with our brothers in the Arab and Muslim worlds and with all countries that support freedom and rights around the world to achieve that noble goal.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that the right of Palestinians to their land is not subject to a statute of limitations, regardless of time. Since the beginning of occupation of Palestine, adults and children have been killed but the Palestinians have not forgotten their rights and land, and will not forget them because the memory of proud peoples cannot forget. The brutal war machine will only make Palestinians more determined to establish their State and hold onto their land, the land of their ancestors. The stability of the region as a whole will not be achieved until the historic injustice is eliminated against the Palestinian people. Therefore, we call on the international community to act rapidly, without any delay. A start would be a ceasefire in Gaza paving the way towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Videche Guevara (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We have now witnessed 150 days of a war that began with the terrorist acts of an armed group. The humanitarian catastrophe affecting the civilian population of Gaza, after almost five months of conflict, is reaching an unsustainable limit, while the Security Council continues to fail to fulfil its primary role.

We commend Algeria's efforts in the search for urgent solutions to that grave situation. We highlight the adoption of Security Council resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) as important steps to address the crisis. Costa Rica urges the implementation of those resolutions as soon as possible, including provisions calling for the expansion of aid at scale, support for the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers and a clear warning against the forced displacement of the population.

However, we continue to witness the absence of what is essential: a Council resolution demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities against civilians and

ensuring safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, which is currently trickling to a suffering civilian population that is suffering and will continue to suffer, despite the calls of 153 States, or more than 80 per cent of the Organization's membership.

In that regard, Costa Rica reiterates its vehement appeal to the members of the Security Council to refrain from using the veto in the event of serious humanitarian situations, since it not only exacerbates crises but also further undermines the credibility of the Security Council and diminishes its capacity to resolve other current and future conflicts. The use of the veto paralyzes the United Nations as a guarantor of peace and security and undermines the credibility of the Council and the Organization. In that spirit, the 34 members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, in the Kingstown declaration of 1 March 2024, adopted by the eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government, made an urgent call to the entire membership to commit themselves to the pursuit of the maintenance of international peace and security, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

There must be a ceasefire for civilians to avoid further human losses, to prevent the conflict from spreading in the region and, most important, to provide a political horizon and a peace and reconstruction plan for the day after the weapons are silenced. Costa Rica reiterates that only a two-State solution can respond to the security needs of Israel and the Israeli people and

to the legitimate aspirations of Palestinian statehood. That implies the creation of a Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The failures of the Security Council disrupt crucial elements of peace and cause humanitarian crises that prolong armed conflicts and increase both suffering and loss of human life in conflict areas. They also result in displaced persons in need of shelter, food, medical and psychological assistance; they result in damage to civilian infrastructure and the environment that is difficult to remedy. Moreover, with each veto, the chances of achieving peace through political and diplomatic efforts diminish. In short, a crisis of confidence and credibility is generated in the institution and the global governance system as a whole.

In an age of crises, only absolute fidelity to the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, respect for international law, international humanitarian law and human rights can ensure that the best days of the Organization are yet to come and are not a thing of the past.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow at 10 a.m. in this Hall after the agenda item announced in *The Journal of the United Nations*.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 63.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.