



# Security Council

Eightieth year

## 9841

st meeting

Monday, 20 January 2025, 3 p.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Bendjama/Mr. Gaouaoui . . . . . (Algeria)

*Members:*

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|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| China . . . . .                                          | Mr. He Mao        |
| Denmark . . . . .                                        | Ms. Landi         |
| France . . . . .                                         | Mr. Dharmadhikari |
| Greece . . . . .                                         | Mr. Stamatekos    |
| Guyana . . . . .                                         | Mrs. Edwards      |
| Pakistan . . . . .                                       | Mr. Sarwani       |
| Panama . . . . .                                         | Mr. Salerno Vega  |
| Republic of Korea . . . . .                              | Mr. Jaeseob Kim   |
| Russian Federation . . . . .                             | Mr. Eremin        |
| Sierra Leone . . . . .                                   | Ms. Baimarro      |
| Slovenia . . . . .                                       | Ms. Jurečko       |
| Somalia . . . . .                                        | Mr. Abdullahi     |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . | Mr. Coyle         |
| United States of America . . . . .                       | Ms. Postel        |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.*

**The President:** I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to Mr. Abdelaziz.

**Mr. Abdelaziz** (*spoke in Arabic*): The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting and for elevating it to the ministerial level in line with the critical moment that the Arab region is going through, and to thank you for your kind invitation for him to speak at this important meeting. A prior engagement has prevented him from being here today, and it is my honour to deliver this statement on his behalf.

“The convening of this Security Council meeting at the ministerial level regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, comes at a very sensitive and delicate time. After 15 full months of Israel’s brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including all the unprecedented documented crimes against the Palestinian people during that aggression, without the slightest criminal or political accountability, the ceasefire agreement that was concluded outside the United Nations and entered into force recently brings a glimmer of hope to the people in Gaza, after they have gone through hell on Earth, suffering in a way never before seen in the recent history of war.

“While the League of Arab States thanks the mediators — Egypt, Qatar and the United States — for making the agreement possible in order to stop the bloodshed of the defenceless Palestinian people and the insane machine of destruction in the Gaza Strip, it also reiterates that the strict and full implementation of the terms and details of the agreement remains a major responsibility, not only for the two parties and the guarantors, but also for the international community and the United Nations, in particular the Security Council. It has become imperative for the Council to pay attention to the plans and intentions of the occupying Power, in particular the colonial goals expressed by its far-right political leaders that seek to empty the Palestinian territory of Palestinian people through displacement and also to annex the Palestinian territory and undermine the whole Palestinian question through the expansion of settlement activities. All those intentions have been declared unequivocally.

“Although we welcome the end of this brutal war, the League of Arab States reiterates that the ceasefire is not a permanent solution. Only achieving the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem, would resolve the Palestinian question. That requires us to work together in an urgent manner to find the political prospects and horizon needed to achieve just and comprehensive peace. We must immediately embark on a serious, credible and irreversible path towards realizing the two-State solution and support the activities of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, formed here at the United Nations in September 2024 in cooperation with the European Union and other actors and launched in Riyadh in October 2024. It continued its work through back-to-back meetings in Brussels and Oslo, with support from the eight-member Arab Islamic committee, under the leadership of Saudi Arabia.

“We must continue to push for the implementation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, issued on 19 July 2024 (see A/78/968) and the full implementation of the resolutions of the tenth emergency session of the General Assembly, particularly in terms of ending the Israeli presence

in the occupied Palestinian territory within one year and the convening of an international conference to implement the two-State solution at the United Nations in June 2025. We must continue to work towards a global summit, during which we would announce the establishment of a free and independent Palestinian State to coincide with the eightieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. That is the path that we must take without any delay or procrastination, regardless of the challenges and obstacles.

“In that regard and in support of the demands of the Groups of Arab and Islamic States and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at the United Nations to grant the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations, we call upon all countries that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to take that important step as soon as possible in support of international legitimacy and the United Nations. I call upon the Security Council to adopt the necessary resolution recommending that the General Assembly recognize the State of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations.

“In order to increase the chances of the ceasefire holding in Gaza and to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, we must all defend fundamental principles, on which there can be no compromise. The Israeli occupation forces must withdraw fully from Gaza. Their attempts to separate the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, which, according to the operative paragraphs of resolutions 2720 (2023) and 2735 (2024), constitute one political unit within the sovereign territory of an independent Palestinian State, must be brought to an end.

“We must also tackle Israel’s dangerous attempts to eliminate Palestinian refugees’ guaranteed right of return by destroying their social, education and health systems through its so-called legislation that seeks to ban the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and is expected to enter into force at the end of the month, despite the considerable efforts made by the coalition in support of UNRWA at the United Nations, the robust resolution adopted at the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly in support of UNRWA’s continuing to play its role (General Assembly resolution 79/88), the groundbreaking press statement issued by the Council (SC/15874) that warns against the devastating consequences of Israel’s legislation as it is in violation of international legitimacy and the decision to seek a further advisory opinion from the International Court Justice on the subject, adopted upon Norway’s proposal.

“All of that attests to the fact that the international community is united in confronting Israel’s malicious intentions. The League of Arab States strongly warns against attempts to undermine the role of UNRWA and believes that there is no alternative to the Agency when it comes to providing basic services to the Palestinian refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular in the areas of health and education. It is thus incumbent on us and the Council to stand up with all our might to Israel’s attempts to eliminate UNRWA or to replace it with other United Nations bodies or agencies that lack the human and financial resources to perform that pivotal and important role — something that those bodies and agencies acknowledge at the highest levels.

“In conclusion, the League of Arab States remains an effective partner of the United Nations in defending the international multilateral system, preserving international legitimacy and securing respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly as they relate to the Palestinian question — the pivotal question for the League of Arab States. The League of Arab States will do its utmost to serve as an effective partner in support of international legitimacy in the State of Palestine, the Lebanese Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic. We will strive with

Council members for a just settlement of all other Arab issues that come before the Council, within a framework of mutual support between the United Nations and the League of Arab States.”

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

**Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein): For the first time in many months, we are able to speak of opportunities to be seized in the Middle East. To seize them, States in the region and all those with influence over them must recommit to international law, in particular the protection of civilians, the inviolability of borders and the protection of all peoples under their jurisdiction.

We welcome the agreement of a ceasefire in Gaza, including a phased return of the hostages. We mourn those for whom the agreement is too late, notably those who have died since May 2024, when the deal was first put forward. The implementation of the agreement will test the commitment of the parties to peace. As a first step, we must see all phases of the deal adhered to by the parties, including the release of hostages and detainees and the provision of aid as agreed, both of which are obligations under international humanitarian law.

We welcome the end of the Al-Assad regime, which brought untold suffering to Syria and its people for too many years. Syrians must finally be able to rebuild their country on their own terms, with support from the international community and in line with the relevant international law. It is their right to live in peace and freedom, in a country that is governed by them and for them and to collectively determine their own destiny. We urge all parties to commit to resolution 2254 (2015), including support for credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance and for free and fair elections. That should include the protection of minority populations.

A peaceful future can be achieved only by reckoning with the crimes perpetrated against the Syrian people, in particular by the Al-Assad regime. There is an unprecedented opportunity for comprehensive accountability for the crimes committed in Syria, including those perpetrated by Mr. Bashar Al-Assad himself, who should be held accountable for crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court. This is also a crucial moment to give active support to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and in particular to provide additional funding for its work. My Government contributed \$150,000 to the accountability mechanism for Syria last week. We pay tribute to the humanitarian workers, who continue to search for those disappeared, arbitrarily detained and tortured by the regime, and to the work of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Liechtenstein acknowledges the election of a President and appointment of a Prime Minister in Lebanon. We hope that those developments will constitute a much-needed breakthrough for the country. The appointment of the former President of the International Court of Justice, Nawaf Salam — an eminent jurist and diplomat and a man whom many of us here know well — bodes well for Lebanon’s future governance.

Developments across the region offer a small measure of hope. We call again for a recommitment to the basic principles of international law. The changing of borders by force to create facts on the ground is illegal and leads only to the erosion of the rule of law and the endangerment of people living there. At this time of change, we must continue to protect the international rule of law and the people who rely on it.

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

**Mr. Umarov** (Kazakhstan): I congratulate Algeria on assuming the presidency and extend a warm welcome to the new members of the Security Council — Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia.

Kazakhstan joins Secretary-General Guterres and the international community in welcoming the deal to secure a ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza, which came into effect yesterday. We commend the efforts of the mediators — Egypt, Qatar and the United States — and urge all relevant parties to honour their commitments to fully implement the agreement, bring the war to an end and achieve lasting peace in Gaza.

As the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has observed, this ceasefire is the start, not the solution. We need a solution. In the context of dire tragedies and deprivations, UNRWA's work is pivotal, serving as a lifeline for some 5.9 million Palestinian refugees, especially the civilians in Gaza. No other organization matches its unique capacity and mandate, and so we must ensure its unimpeded continuity.

Kazakhstan firmly advocates for a peaceful resolution to the situation in Syria through diplomacy and dialogue. We reaffirm our commitment to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to resolution 2254 (2015) as the basis for achieving peace and stability.

We welcome the ceasefire agreement reached on 27 November 2024 between Israel and Lebanon, which involved the five mediating countries, including the United States and France. We also call on all nations to uphold this important agreement, together with the Gaza deal, so as to secure overall peace in the Middle East.

Kazakhstan is deeply committed to peaceful means and diplomacy for an immediate cessation of the hostilities and a de-escalation of the violence in the Middle East, which threatens regional and global stability. Kazakhstan is of the firm conviction that only the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, under a two-State solution, will result in lasting peace. That is not only a political framework but also a moral obligation. Therefore, the Security Council, as the principal guardian of peace and security, must bear its responsibilities and reinvigorate international frameworks, initiatives and Council resolutions in order to advance reconciliation.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan stands with the people of the Middle East in their quest for peace, justice and stability.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

**Ms. Joyini** (South Africa): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this critically important quarterly debate on the Palestinian question. We wish to acknowledge the presence of the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. We gather here today at a time when there may be hope for peace between Israel and Palestine. We welcome the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas and hope that it will bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, in general, and those in Gaza, in particular. We also welcome the release of Israeli hostages by Hamas. It is vital that all parties respect the terms of the ceasefire agreement.

This is a historical moment that we hope will be a positive step towards a peaceful solution — not only for the immediate onslaught on Gaza, but also towards meaningful negotiations aimed at permanently resolving the Palestinian question and ending the occupation. We thank the United States, Qatar and Egypt for their efforts in making this ceasefire a possibility. All of us in the international community must support the implementation of the agreement. Given the importance of this ceasefire agreement, South Africa calls for its endorsement by the Security Council. Such an endorsement would ensure its sanctity.

We also hope that this moment will encourage the Palestinians to forge ahead in unison as they rebuild Gaza and develop their State in the long term. Gaza has been reduced to rubble, and a significant amount of resources — financial and otherwise — will be required to rebuild it. We believe that all members of the international community must lend a hand in rebuilding Gaza.

History provides examples of good conflict resolution principles. The killing and displacement of Palestinians is not the solution. The annexation of Palestinian lands, parts of Syria or other lands is not the solution. The solution lies in dialogue and a willingness to make progress towards a just peace. The solution also lies in a negotiated settlement that allows for Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in peaceful coexistence.

It has now been almost 16 months of a brutal onslaught against the people of Gaza. Over the past year, 840 Palestinians have been killed and more than 4,000 forcibly displaced in the West Bank. We hope that with the ceasefire agreed, all of these grave human rights contraventions will be halted immediately, and the primary responsibility for that lies with the Government of Israel. There must also be accountability for these violations.

Alongside the political process is the more immediate need for humanitarian relief. As it stands, the amount of available aid is drastically insufficient, and the international community must provide support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and continue providing other much-needed aid. As others have mentioned, UNRWA remains critically vital towards the logistical task of dispersing vast amounts of much-needed aid. Without the support of UNRWA, thousands more may perish due to starvation, hypothermia and diseases. We urge all parties involved to develop a solution that will ensure that UNRWA is able to continue to operate swiftly and without hindrance.

We must now fast-track measures towards the recognition of Palestine as a State. All members of the Security Council profess their support for the two-State solution. We therefore call on all States to convert those sentiments into reality by accepting Palestine as the 194th Member of the United Nations. The status quo of refusing to admit Palestine as a full Member will only serve to perpetuate the conflict and suffering. When Palestine is afforded equal status in the international community, peaceful coexistence will become possible.

Additionally, we call on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, including the fulfilment of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, provisional measures issued by the Court and the recent Security Council resolutions on Gaza. That includes an end to Israeli occupation of Palestine, the facilitation of the return of displaced Palestinians and the right to self-determination for Palestinians.

In conclusion, we cannot allow the Palestinian people to be decimated through bombs, starvation and displacement while the world is seemingly unable to act. Similarly, their right to self-determination cannot be undermined, as it is etched in international law.

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

**Mr. Hmoud** (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude for your remarkable efforts, Mr. President, in presiding over the work of the Council during the month of January. That includes convening this very important meeting in the light of the rapid regional developments, which require a firm stance from the Security Council in support of international peace and security, in line with the responsibilities entrusted to it in the Charter of the United Nations. I also thank the Secretary-General for his informative briefing to the Council.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan welcomes the ceasefire agreement in Gaza and its entry into force yesterday. We are deeply grateful for all the efforts made by the Republic of Egypt, the State of Qatar and the United States of America in order to reach this agreement. We stress the importance of fully implementing all the terms and phases of the agreement in order to alleviate civilian suffering and ensure the stability of the situation in Gaza, throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and in the region as a whole. Against that backdrop, we underscore the need to take urgent international action to ensure that sufficient and sustainable humanitarian assistance reaches Gaza in order to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the Israeli war on Gaza, which has resulted in the death of tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians, the injury of hundreds of thousands, the starvation and displacement of the population of the Gaza Strip and in their being deprived of their fundamental right to healthcare. The war also targeted United Nations personnel, relief and healthcare workers and journalists.

The scope of the humanitarian tragedy calls for an urgent and comprehensive international response that ensures the unfettered delivery of necessary assistance and for protection to be afforded to the civilian population, in keeping with international humanitarian law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We also stress the importance of launching a serious and comprehensive effort to rebuild Gaza in order to ensure that the needs of the population are met, infrastructure is rebuilt and the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people comes to an end. Achieving that requires genuine international cooperation to ensure the provision of the necessary financial and technical support and to facilitate unhindered access to resources and capabilities, with a focus on the sustainability of those efforts in order to help to alleviate human suffering and achieve humanitarian, social and economic recovery in the Gaza Strip.

Under the direct guidance and follow-up of King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, Jordan continues to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, guided by its fraternal and humanitarian duty to take an unwavering stand alongside the brotherly Palestinian people in their endeavours to achieve their legitimate rights and achieve a just and comprehensive peace. Jordan sent 141 humanitarian aid convoys consisting of 5,127 trucks through the land route to the Gaza Strip, with a total weight of 65,257 tons. It carried out 391 airdrops during the war in various areas in the north and south of the Gaza Strip.

As a humanitarian hub, Jordan is working to increase the aid emanating from it to Gaza and stands ready to cooperate with all partners to deliver their aid through the Kingdom to Gaza. Jordanian field hospitals will continue to provide medical services to the people of Gaza. Work is under way to expand the services provided, including through the Restoring Hope campaign, which aims to provide prosthetic limbs and medical care to the more than 16,000 people who have lost limbs in Gaza, enabling them to gain the ability to use the prostheses within a mere two hours of fitting.

We call on the international community to intensify efforts to stabilize the ceasefire and to build on it in order to open up genuine prospects leading to a just and comprehensive solution. That solution must materialize in the form of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the lines of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of international law and the adopted international terms of reference, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, to live in peace and security alongside Israel. Jordan will continue to work in cooperation with our regional and international partners to achieve a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution, which is the only way to end the conflict and protect the region from the outbreak of more wars and conflicts.

Israel continues to take unilateral, provocative and escalatory measures in the occupied Palestinian territory that run counter to its obligations as the occupying Power and undermine the two-State solution and the chances of achieving a just peace. In that context, Jordan cautions against the continuation of the cycle of violence, against the backdrop of the completely stalled peace process. Jordan also warns of Israel's continued steps aimed at changing the legal and historical status quo in the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and dividing it temporally or spatially, in violation of international law and Israel's obligations as an occupying Power.

Consequently, we emphasize the need for Israel to fully commit to respecting the historical status quo on Al-Haram Al-Sharif that was in place prior to the year 2000. There is a need to guarantee respect of the fact that the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, with its area of 144 dunums, is a place of worship exclusively for Muslims. In that regard, we emphasize that the Jordanian Jerusalem Waqf and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs Administration is the legal entity with exclusive jurisdiction to manage the affairs of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and regulate access to it.

With regard to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), my delegation reaffirms the pivotal role played by the Agency in promoting regional stability, while stressing that its role is indispensable, as UNRWA is an essential factor for stability in the region. We emphasize the importance of UNRWA continuing to play its role in accordance with its United Nations mandate, and we stress that there is no other entity capable of fulfilling the Agency's role of providing vital services to Palestine refugees, whether in Gaza or in the rest of its five fields of operation.

In that context, we emphasize the illegitimacy of the laws passed by the Israeli Knesset to prohibit the work of the Agency and obstruct the work of its staff and facilities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which are to take effect at the end of this month. That step constitutes a dangerous precedent and a clear violation of international law and will directly affect the vital services provided by UNRWA to millions of Palestine refugees, exacerbating the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Those laws and other measures taken by Israel against the Agency represent a grave violation of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power and a breach of the inviolability of the Agency, its facilities and staff, under the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

We reiterate our call on the international community to take immediate action to address those measures and ensure that UNRWA continues to fulfil its mandate, and to support it financially and politically so that it can continue to perform its essential role of providing vital services and promoting security and stability in the region.

We must work together to ensure the implementation of the ceasefire in Gaza and the entry of immediate and sufficient humanitarian aid to all parts of the Gaza Strip. We must take collective action to launch a sustained effort to implement the two-State solution and achieve the just and lasting peace that the region deserves.

There are changes taking place in our region that we must deal with clearly, with vision and determination, to move together towards a better future of peace, security and stability. We must restore hope to our peoples, hope for a peace that guarantees the security of all, and that peace is possible. We look forward to working with all Member States and with the new United States Administration, which assumes its responsibilities today, to put our region on the path to that future.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

**Ms. Schwalger** (New Zealand): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, Australia and my own country, New Zealand.

We continue to unequivocally condemn Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023. After 15 months of conflict and devastating loss of civilian life, we welcome the announcement of a ceasefire and hostage agreement in Gaza. We hope that that critical step will mark the beginning of a new chapter for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and de-escalate tensions in the region. We thank Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their considerable efforts in helping achieve that agreement. We urge all parties to respect its terms and safeguard a lasting peace.

Our thoughts remain with the families of all civilians killed in this conflict and with those displaced or taken hostage, along with the many humanitarian workers who lost their lives in the service of others.

There remains much work to be done — to release all remaining hostages, including the remains of those deceased; to ensure safe, rapid, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian assistance to civilians; to support reconstruction efforts; and to ensure that Hamas has no role in the future governance of Gaza. We will continue to act in partnership with the international community to support the urgent humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza, particularly during a harsh winter. And we remain committed to working towards achieving a two-State solution — a Palestinian state and the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

We expect Israel to take urgent action to allow greater humanitarian access to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. All parties must fully adhere to international humanitarian law, including by protecting humanitarian personnel. They are essential in facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need.

As the Security Council has stated, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a vital role across the region and is the backbone of all humanitarian response in Gaza. It is clear that attempts to dismantle or diminish UNRWA's operations and mandate will have severe humanitarian consequences for the millions of Palestinian civilians who rely on its services. UNRWA must be able to continue its life-saving work.

We urge Iran to refrain from further attacks and condemn the Houthis' ongoing reckless acts against Israel. Canada, Australia and New Zealand also welcome the ceasefire agreement to bring an end to hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah and urge all parties to implement its terms fully. The ceasefire is critical to alleviating the suffering of communities on both sides of the border and ensuring displaced populations can return home.

We welcome the recent presidential election which resulted in the election of Joseph Aoun and the subsequent appointment of Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister. Those are positive steps, and we call on the newly appointed Prime Minister to form a cabinet and adopt necessary political and economic reform and for the Government to support the ceasefire's implementation by asserting its full sovereignty over Lebanese territory.

In a further positive development, we have witnessed the fall of the Al-Assad regime in Syria, a regime that for decades sponsored conflict, oppression, division and displacement. We are witnessing a long overdue opportunity for a chapter of peace, security and stability for the people of Syria. We very much hope that this will be seized. Canada, Australia and New Zealand support the principles outlined in the December 2024 Aqaba statement. And we hope to see a transparent political process that produces an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative Government, which protects the rights of all Syrians.

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

**Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on convening of this meeting, which has been presided over by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, and to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose monarch, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, would like to welcome the entry into force of the ceasefire agreement and commends the efforts being undertaken to end attacks on civilians. We hope that the ceasefire agreement will be fully respected and lead to the cessation of attacks on civilians, the return of displaced persons, the release of hostages and detainees and the unimpeded delivery of sufficient humanitarian assistance. As His Majesty King Mohammed VI emphasized in his royal message to the most recent Arab summit, "it is essential to avoid a situation in which one crisis ends just as another begins". Respect for and the maintaining of the ceasefire would allow for rebuilding and genuine peace and the establishment of a Palestinian State, along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and with Palestinians living in peace and security side by side with Israelis, to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East.

The Kingdom of Morocco stresses the vital and important role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). No other entity can play the role that the Agency plays in serving the Palestinian refugees in its various areas of operations. Since its establishment, UNRWA has played an essential role in providing support to our Palestinian brothers and has become the backbone of that humanitarian work, particularly during the repeated wars in Gaza. Therefore, it is crucial for the Agency to be provided the necessary and sufficient resources to fulfil its mandate. The Kingdom of Morocco also calls for UNRWA to continue to assume its responsibility in providing services to Palestinian refugees in all five of its areas of operation until a just solution is reached for the plight of the Palestinian refugees and their return to their homes, villages and cities.

Israel's continued unilateral measures against Al-Quds Al-Sharif are a serious provocation, which fuel extremism, tensions and violence. King Mohammed VI, in his capacity as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, is following closely with great interest all developments with regard to the Palestinian question, including the importance of preserving the status of quo of Jerusalem as a holy city for the followers of the three monotheistic religions and a centre for the values of dialogue, respect and mutual understanding. In parallel, the Al-Quds Committee plays its political and practical role in support of the Palestinian people, in particular those residing in Jerusalem. The Committee is continuing its efforts, in coordination with the efforts being made under the auspices and the instruction of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, to rebuild houses and provide humanitarian and social assistance to the residents of Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of Morocco, under the enlightened instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, supports Lebanon's territorial unity and sovereignty and is of the view that the stability of Lebanon is very important in order to preserve its unity and the security and safety of its people. The Kingdom of Morocco hopes that the ceasefire leads to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

The Kingdom of Morocco is closely following the events unfolding in Syria. The sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian people and their right to choose their own fate must be protected. We hope that the most recent developments will contribute to bringing stability to Syria and to realizing the aspirations of the Syrian people for peace, security, development and the building of a better future.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco underscores its clear, firm and consistent position on the Palestinian question. We are of the view that settling the Palestinian

question on the basis of the two-State solution, in which Gaza is an integral part of the independent Palestinian territories, is the key to peace, security and stability in the Middle East region. We stress that the Palestinian Authority should exercise political control over Gaza. We fully and unconditionally support the Palestinian people and their aspirations to establish their own independent State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

**Mr. Gómez Hernández (Spain)** (*spoke in Spanish*): For the first time in 15 months of instability in the Middle East, I am pleased to take the floor to discuss a reason for hope: the entry into force of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. I want to express my thanks to the mediators — Qatar, Egypt and the United States. Spain will work towards the success of the ceasefire, namely, for the release of all hostages, the massive entry of humanitarian aid and the stabilization and reconstruction of Gaza. Spain also believes that there can be no credible humanitarian action without the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is irreplaceable and indispensable to the ceasefire's success and to the serious humanitarian needs in the Strip being addressed.

Stability and reconstruction in Gaza are the subject of the later phases of the agreement. We therefore continue to encourage the parties to take the necessary decisions and the guarantor countries to continue to support them. The Palestinian Authority, which is our partner for peace, must also shoulder its responsibilities as a Government in Gaza, restore basic services and security. On that basis, we must continue to work on the implementation of the two-State solution, which is the only path to peace in the region. Only will a viable, realistic and contiguous Palestinian State, comprising Gaza and the West Bank and with East Jerusalem as its capital, be able to satisfy the legitimate aspirations for peace. That is why I welcome the convening of the international conference here at the United Nations in June and encourage all participants to continue working in parallel in the work of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, with the idea that both initiatives will contribute decisively to our commitment to peace.

Another reason for hope is the cessation of hostilities agreement between Israel and Lebanon. We are confident that fighting will not resume once the agreement expires, and we call on the parties to continue working on its implementation and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Spain will continue to support stability in Lebanon through the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, the security of which must be guaranteed. Last week, Spain announced an increase in its support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, with a €10 million package managed by the United Nations Development Programme, and additional aid from Spain to contribute to the country's reconstruction. We welcome the election of President Aoun and the progress made in forming a Government as soon as possible that is fully capable of addressing the reforms that the country needs.

In Syria, Spain supports a peaceful and inclusive political transition, which is why we are promoting a progressive suspension of European Union sanctions to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid and the economic recovery of the country, provided that there is progress in the transition process and that fundamental rights, including those of religious communities and women, are respected. We support the role of the United Nations in supporting the transition and contributing to accountability and the oversight of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons of chemical weapons stockpiles. We hope that, in this new stage, progress will be made in the fight against Da'esh, preventing its resurgence, and that the security of the Da'esh prison camps that exist in the country will be maintained. We will continue to work to achieve the conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees as part of our contribution to regional stabilization efforts.

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

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We congratulate Algeria on its presidency in January and thank it for convening today's open debate.

Switzerland welcomes the agreement reached on 15 January for a ceasefire in Gaza, the release of hostages and a significant increase in humanitarian aid, among other measures. We salute the tireless mediation efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar. We also recognize the central role of the International Committee of the Red Cross as a neutral humanitarian intermediary. A ceasefire was long overdue after 15 months of appalling violence that has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians, including countless children. We call on the parties to implement the agreement in good faith and in a comprehensive manner so that all the phases can be completed and a definitive end can be put to the war.

Since 7 October 2023, Switzerland has strongly condemned the acts of terror and hostage-taking perpetrated by Hamas. When we were a member of the Security Council, also in the light of the war in Gaza, we were committed to an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and respect for international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law, including the protection of civilians and humanitarian access to and within Gaza. Switzerland has relentlessly insisted on the implementation of the Council's resolutions.

The humanitarian response must be considerably increased in order to meet the immense needs of the population. Facilitating rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access is an obligation under international humanitarian law. The parties must remove all obstacles. That includes access to and distribution within Gaza. Switzerland calls on the parties to also respect their obligations relating to the protection of civilians, including humanitarian personnel and civilian infrastructure, as recalled in resolution 2730 (2024). We condemn all attacks against them, including the Israeli fire that hit a World Food Programme convoy in Gaza on 5 January.

Switzerland remains very concerned about the consequences of the laws adopted by the Knesset on 28 October 2024 against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the mandate of which was defined by the General Assembly. Those laws are largely incompatible with Israel's obligations under international law. Switzerland recalls that, as the occupying Power, Israel is obliged in particular to ensure the provision of foodstuffs and medicines to the population of the occupied Palestinian territory. UNRWA provides basic and quasi-State services there. It is an essential humanitarian player, particularly at a time when the ceasefire agreement is being implemented. The implementation of Council resolutions and agreements between the parties — such as the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974 on the occupied Golan or the agreement that led to the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon on 27 November 2024 — is essential for de-escalation and peace. Switzerland supports the key role of the United Nations, its humanitarian agencies, peace missions and Special Envoys in the region.

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the record levels of violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We condemn all violence against civilians and civilian property, including continued settler violence against Palestinian civilians and the attack on Israeli civilians in a bus on 6 January. All perpetrators must be brought to justice. The Israeli occupation, which has been ongoing since 1967, is illegal, as the International Court of Justice has found, and must end as soon as possible. It is a major obstacle to the two-State solution, which is the only option for Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace, security and dignity, within secure and recognized borders, in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters. The conclusion of the agreement of 15 January

and the start of its implementation are but a first long-overdue step. The parties must finally commit to restoring a political perspective. We hope that the Security Council will enforce its own resolutions in that regard and will help to shape the peace process that the region and the world desperately need.

**The President:** I give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

**Mr. Novicio** (Philippines): The Philippines welcomes the long-awaited ceasefire and hostage deal reached by Israel and Hamas, which came into effect yesterday, 19 January. The Philippines reiterates its position that diplomacy remains the cornerstone of achieving an enduring peace in the Middle East and that the ongoing conflict can only be resolved through diplomatic engagement, dialogue and comprehensive negotiations based on trust and rooted in the primacy of international law. We hope that the hostage and ceasefire deal will be implemented completely and expeditiously, will stop the fighting in Gaza, will accelerate life-saving humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians and will reunite the hostages with their families. We commend Egypt, Qatar and the United States for brokering the deal through intensive diplomacy.

However, even as we welcome the ceasefire and the hostage agreement, we remain gravely concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. As the Secretary-General highlighted, it is imperative that the ceasefire remove the significant security and political obstacles to delivering aid across Gaza so that we can support a major increase in urgent life-saving humanitarian support. In that regard, we join the Secretary-General's call for all parties to adhere to their obligations under international law, with particular emphasis on the protection of civilians, especially women and children, and the facilitation of rapid, unhindered and safe humanitarian relief for all civilians in need in Gaza.

The enduring and complicated Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a strategic piece in achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Today, as always, the Philippines reaffirms its steadfast commitment to a two-State solution that addresses the needs of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians with the aim of achieving a just and lasting peace and security in the region. To that end and consistent with past international agreements and the relevant United Nations resolutions, we support steps that would expand the space for meaningful dialogue and negotiation, building trust, mutual understanding and cooperation for the purposes of peace. We also support the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore commend and support the efforts of Saudi Arabia, Norway and the European Union in spearheading the Global Alliance for the Implementation of a Palestinian State and a Two-State Solution.

Given its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2027—2028 term on the basis of its solid track record and contributions to peace and justice, the Philippines reiterates its enduring support and cooperation as we work together and commit to ending war, upholding justice, respecting human rights and maintaining international peace and security.

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

**Mr. Mythen** (Ireland): Ireland aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

I thank Algeria for convening today's meeting and thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing this morning.

Today's meeting comes at a time of profound relief for the peoples of Israel and Gaza, following last week's ceasefire and hostage release deal. Hostages held by Hamas in Gaza are finally being released and reunited with their loved ones after

immense trauma and suffering over the past 15 months. All remaining hostages must be released. Civilians in Gaza finally have some reprieve from the unprecedented and devastating suffering of the past 15 months, with more than 46,000 Palestinians killed, the majority women and children.

The year 2025 offers the opportunity to chart a better course. However, we cannot overstate the scale of the challenge. In Gaza, homes, schools and hospitals have been reduced to rubble. So, too, have the hopes and aspirations of a lost generation. A massive scale-up of humanitarian aid is needed, as are the restoration of basic services and a clear framework for the return of those displaced during the war. Palestinian Authority governance is crucial for this next phase in Gaza.

Ireland pays tribute to the work of the mediators — the United States, Egypt and Qatar — over many months to reach an agreement. We urge all parties to continue working on the full implementation of all phases of the ceasefire and the hostage release deal. The ceasefire must become permanent.

Gaza must now begin the daunting task of rebuilding and recovery. Humanitarian workers will continue to be central to those efforts, as urgent and unimpeded aid needs to reach all parts of Gaza at scale. Over the past 15 months, the unwavering commitment of humanitarian workers to serve those desperately in need of assistance has provided rare glimpses of hope and solidarity, and indeed humanity, with many risking their lives and paying the ultimate price. Ireland pays tribute to all humanitarians, who demonstrate the best of humanity every day. Their resolve will be needed in the days and weeks ahead.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been at the very core of those efforts — the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza. UNRWA is irreplaceable. No other agency can match the scale of its operations. If Israel implements the Knesset legislation, which would effectively halt UNRWA operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, the result would be simply catastrophic. Ireland again calls on Israel to end the attacks on UNRWA and to facilitate its life-saving work.

We are also seriously alarmed at the worsening situation in the West Bank, especially the use of aerial attacks by Israel. We call for urgent de-escalation. We call on Israel to end its illegal settlement policy as a matter of urgency. Illegal settlement expansion undermines any future, credible peace process.

The future of the region remains precarious. The ceasefire in Lebanon is fragile. The situation in Syria is uncertain. And there is a real risk of escalation in Yemen. The region should not endure any further conflict and human suffering. There is an opportunity now to strive for a better future for all the peoples of the region. We welcome the election of President Joseph Aoun and the designation of Mr. Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister in Lebanon. We hope that a stable Government can be formed soon, and we call on Israel and Hizbullah to remain committed to the ceasefire. In Syria, an inclusive transition process in line with the key elements of resolution 2254 (2015), respect for human rights and the protection of vulnerable communities is essential. The territorial integrity of Syria must be respected, especially by neighbouring States.

Ireland remains convinced that the implementation of the two-State solution is the only way to establish lasting peace and security for both Israel and Palestine and the wider region. We must all collectively resolve to work towards the achievement of that objective. Israel and Palestine must actively and urgently engage in a meaningful political process, while the international community must intensify efforts to implement a two-State solution, step up support for the Palestinian Authority and focus on rebuilding and reconstructing Gaza. Ireland will continue to play its part.

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

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate sisterly Algeria on its presidency of the Security Council this month and for convening this important periodic debate. We also appreciate Algeria's active role in serving the causes of international peace and security under the current international circumstances. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Tunisia welcomes the agreement on a ceasefire in Gaza, after more than 15 months of a systematic genocide that has inflicted great harm on the conscience of humankind. We salute the resilience of the brotherly Palestinian people and stand in awe at their precious sacrifice and the pure blood that they have shed in facing the Zionist machine of murder and destruction, in order to ensure that the aggression ends and to uphold their human and natural right to dignity and life. Tunisia calls on the international community to assume responsibility for putting a definitive end to the occupying Power's immoral actions so that the ceasefire in Gaza holds, the siege is fully lifted and the Palestinian people can enjoy their right to humanitarian assistance and to rebuild their country in a way that strengthens the foundations for a decent life of security and dignity.

Tunisia points out that reaching a ceasefire should not detract from the responsibility of those who advocate for what is right and for justice in the world to continue pursuing officials of the occupation entity so as to hold them accountable for the genocide and massive abuses that they perpetrated against the Palestinian people in Gaza and elsewhere in the occupied Palestinian territory. The acts of aggression resulted in the loss of more than 45,000 Palestinian martyrs and tens of thousands of wounded innocent civilians, most of them children and women, in addition to the systematic targeting of hospitals, medical staff, journalists, aid workers and forcibly displaced persons' tents. Humanitarian assistance has been prevented and hunger has been used as a weapon of war and collective punishment, without any accountability.

We condemn these violations, war crimes and genocide committed by the occupation against the Palestinian people, and we stress that it is unacceptable by all standards that the Security Council and the General Assembly resolutions and the advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice remain unimplemented even as the occupation authorities continue to commit the same crimes and violations for which those resolutions were adopted. What is worse, the occupation authorities not only disregarded the relevant humanitarian and legal instruments and resolutions, but they persisted in their aggression and in defying the will of the international community.

The authorities targeted the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to further deepen the suffering of Palestinian refugees, destroy the fabric of Palestinian society and weaken the refugee dossier, as well as to continue plans for forced displacement and for emptying Palestinian lands of their inhabitants. In that context, Tunisia reiterates its call on the international community to shoulder its responsibility in saving the Palestinian people from this genocidal machine and putting an end to the policies of occupation and its disregard for United Nations resolutions.

Tunisia supports justice and rights and rejects all forms of injustice and aggression. We stress the need to address the root cause of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is the occupation. We also reaffirm our unwavering support for the steadfastness of the valiant Palestinian people and their national unity at this crucial stage in their struggle to recover their legitimate, inalienable and imprescriptible rights, foremost of which is their right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign and independent State on all the land of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Algeria for convening this important meeting.

The Islamic Republic of Iran congratulates the courageous people of Palestine, especially in Gaza, and all supporters of the Palestinian resistance worldwide, on the achievement of the Gaza ceasefire agreement. This victory reflects the bravery, unity and resilience of the Palestinian people, who have endured immense suffering, including genocide and forced displacement.

In that context, I want to make the following points.

First, Gaza remains the centre of a deep humanitarian crisis. This tragedy exposed double standards, moral failures and inaction from the international community and the Security Council. The atrocities committed by the Israeli apartheid regime are shocking. Families have been wiped out, hospitals and schools destroyed and critical infrastructure demolished. The blockade on Gaza has turned life for over 2 million people into a daily struggle, depriving them of food, water, medicine and electricity. These actions are collective punishment on an unimaginable scale.

Secondly, while a welcome step, the ceasefire must be transformed into a permanent and sustainable solution. That demands the full withdrawal of Israeli forces, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and a robust, comprehensive reconstruction plan for Gaza. Israel's unwillingness to fully withdraw and its insistence on maintaining control over Gaza's security undermines those efforts and perpetuates instability. The Council must take a united and strong position in defending Gaza's territorial integrity. Moreover, the international community must prioritize safeguarding the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and ensure predictable, sustained funding to support Palestinian refugees. Equally critical is addressing the escalating violence in the West Bank, including the surge in settler attacks, which pose a serious threat to peace and security and require immediate, decisive action.

Thirdly, Israel's heinous crimes in Gaza, including the mass killings of civilians, the destruction of vital infrastructure and the forced displacement of entire communities constitute acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Such crimes cannot be overlooked after the ceasefire. Accountability and prosecution must be pursued. Uncompromising accountability is crucial for justice and preventing further atrocities. It is imperative that the Security Council remain objective and not succumb to the propaganda of the terrorist regime of Israel, which seeks to deflect attention from these underlying issues.

Fourthly, the Israeli regime must honour its commitment to the ceasefire with Lebanon, immediately halt its violations of Lebanese sovereignty and withdraw its forces from southern Lebanon within 60 days after the ceasefire agreement entered into effect. The Security Council must adopt a firm position to ensure the full and precise implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Likewise, Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights violates the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, as well as resolution 497 (1981), which declared Israel's annexation illegal.

Finally, resistance movements across the region are a legitimate response to the decades of Israeli occupation, aggression and expansionist policies. The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its steadfast support of the Palestinian right to self-defence and resistance under international law.

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

**Mrs. Güven** (Türkiye): I express our sincere appreciation to Algeria for convening this important debate. I also express our gratitude to Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing and his leadership during overlapping global crises.

Türkiye welcomes the ceasefire agreement and thanks the mediating countries for their efforts. During 15 months of relentless warfare, the people of Gaza endured immense human suffering, with countless lives lost, many injured and widespread displacement under the international community's watch. Now the ceasefire, although long overdue, provides a glimmer of hope. It is vital to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement, make it permanent and deliver urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Since 7 October, the international community has called for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all captives and the delivery of unhindered humanitarian aid in Gaza. With the ceasefire in place, we must ensure that these calls are fully realized.

First, Israel must be held accountable for its commitments, including establishing a permanent ceasefire, withdrawing forces from Gaza and enabled the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

Secondly, Gaza must receive urgent humanitarian relief. Recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Gaza must be supported. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a central role in that regard. Since 7 October, UNRWA has been a cornerstone of humanitarian operations in Gaza, leveraging its unique mandate and decades of experience. Israel's attempts to obstruct UNRWA's operations violate its legal obligations under international law and set a dangerous precedent for the United Nations and multilateralism itself. We urge the Security Council and Member States alike to shield and support UNRWA until a just and lasting two-State solution is achieved.

That brings me to my third point. If we are to halt the vicious cycle of violence, it will be crucial to address the root causes of the conflict, the ongoing illegal occupation and the denial of the rights of Palestinians. Türkiye firmly supports tackling those underlying issues and remains committed to the vision of two States, which is the only viable solution for lasting peace. Establishing an independent, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is imperative for a just and peaceful future. We must intensify our efforts to achieve a two-State solution, ending the illegal occupation as per General Assembly resolution ES-10/24, of September 2024, and recognizing Palestine as a full member of the United Nations.

While we hope that the war has ended, the crimes committed over the past 15 months must not go unpunished. The collective punishments, civilian deaths and attacks on humanitarian workers cannot be met with impunity. Türkiye has formally submitted its declaration of intervention under article 63 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice and has sponsored General Assembly resolution 79/232, submitted by Norway, seeking the Court's advisory opinion on the occupying Power's responsibilities. We remain steadfast in our support for the Court's efforts.

The war in Gaza has shaken the law-based international system and highlighted the importance of adhering to international law and humanitarian principles. Peace negotiations must commence immediately to establish an independent State of Palestine. Only by addressing the root causes can we ensure an end to the suffering and create the conditions for a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We therefore call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities in that regard. My country will continue to support efforts to that end and will continue to stand with the Palestinian people.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates): I would like to begin by commending Algeria for its leadership of the presidency of the Security Council this month and by thanking Foreign Minister Attaf for presiding over the meeting this morning.

As this is the first time that I am address the Council this year, I want to take the opportunity to welcome the new Council members — Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia — and to congratulate the members who recently completed their terms — Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland — for their commendable service over the past two years. I also thank Secretary-General Guterres for his statement and welcome his appointment of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ad interim.

After 15 months of devastation and destruction, we now come to the Council with profound hope that a horrific period of violence is coming to a permanent end. The ceasefire is an important first step on the long road to peace and recovery for the wider region — one that ends the cycles of violence once and for all. Today I would like to highlight three points that are key to paving the way to a more peaceful future.

First, we need the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The United Arab Emirates welcomes the ceasefire and the release of detainees, hostages and captives. We commend Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their persistent commitment to finding a diplomatic solution. It is a reminder that solutions are forged not in the fires of war but at the negotiating table.

Secondly, the humanitarian aid must be scaled up and delivered immediately. We welcome the first delivery of humanitarian aid following the ceasefire and call for aid to be delivered throughout Gaza at an accelerated pace. The United Arab Emirates has been a steadfast supporter of the humanitarian efforts in Gaza over the past 15 months, and we are working closely with United Nations partners to scale up the aid to reach those most in need. Facilitating the entry of commercial goods into Gaza will also be critical to sustaining livelihoods and rebuilding stability. The entry and distribution of aid must be secure. Any attempts to obstruct its entry, and any attacks on humanitarian workers, are unacceptable. International law must be respected. That is particularly important as we approach the date that the Knesset's laws on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are slated to come into effect, because they would effectively prohibit UNRWA's essential work within the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and undermine the humanitarian response during the ceasefire.

Lastly, while we address the immediate needs of today, it is essential that we also lay the groundwork for tomorrow. We must accelerate our efforts to advance a two-State solution and establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State — a State that lives free from the indignities of illegal occupation, that unifies the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, under a reformed Palestinian Authority, and that thrives in peace, prosperity and security, living side by side with Israel. After 471 days, it has never been clearer that this is the only path to lasting peace between Palestine and Israel. The status quo was, and remains, untenable.

Today we have a rare opportunity to move forward, not backwards. Our next steps can define whether we return to the circumstances that led to the horrific violence perpetrated on 7 October 2023 and the death, destruction and dehumanization that followed — or whether they can enable us to fundamentally reshape the trajectory of the region's most protracted conflict towards a just and lasting peace. We must make sure that it is the latter.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Lambrinidis.

**Mr. Lambrinidis:** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon, following the mediation efforts undertaken, in particular by France and the United States. It urges the parties to implement the ceasefire as agreed and calls for the full and symmetric implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In that context, the EU recalls the fundamental stabilizing role that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon plays in southern Lebanon. We will continue to support the Lebanese State's sovereignty, territorial integrity and state-building efforts, including by contributing to the strengthening of the Lebanese Armed Forces. The EU also warmly welcomes the election of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and the designation of Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister.

Following the fall of Al-Assad's criminal regime in Syria, the European Union emphasizes the historic opportunity to reunite and rebuild the country and restore justice and ensure accountability. We underline the importance of an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in line with the core principles of resolution 2254 (2015). We underline the importance of addressing the severe and continuing humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, of ensuring respect for human rights, including women's rights, non-sectarian governance and the protection of members of all religious and ethnic minorities, and of safeguarding Syria's cultural heritage. We call on all parties to preserve national unity and ensure the protection of all civilians, the provision of public services and the creation of conditions for an inclusive and peaceful political transition and for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees, as defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The EU also emphasizes the importance of the fight against terrorism, preventing the re-emergence of terrorist groups and destroying Syria's remaining chemical-weapon stockpiles, with the assistance of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The EU has started discussions on its sanctions on Syria in order to adjust them in the light of the ongoing developments.

The EU warmly welcomes the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, which will allow for the phased release of the hostages and ease the humanitarian suffering in Gaza, ending those terrible ordeals. It is vital that the deal be fully implemented. We extend our gratitude to the United States, Egypt and Qatar for their efforts in negotiating the ceasefire. This is a significant achievement, which should have positive repercussions across the Middle East.

The EU deplores the unacceptable number of civilian casualties, especially women and children, in Gaza and the West Bank, and the catastrophic levels of hunger and the imminent risk of famine caused by the insufficient entry of aid into Gaza. It also recalls the need to fully implement the International Court of Justice's orders. The EU expresses its deep concern at the consequences of the Israeli legislation adopted on 28 October 2024 for the capacity of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to fulfil its mandate. The EU again stresses the essential role of UNRWA. Continued implementation of the UNRWA action plan is key, including implementation of the Colonna report. It is essential that UNRWA can continue carrying out its crucial work.

The EU strongly condemns the further escalation in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, following increased terrorist attacks, settler violence, the expansion of illegal settlements and Israel's military operation. The EU calls for safe access to the holy sites and for the status quo to be upheld.

We reiterate, as so many others have in this Chamber today, our commitment to international law and to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the two-State solution, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, whereby two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders. The EU is ready to contribute to all efforts towards

that solution and calls on all parties to refrain from actions that undermine its viability. The European Union will continue supporting the Palestinian Authority to help it to address its most pressing needs, build institutional capacities and implement its reform agenda. As part of the EU's long-standing commitment to supporting Palestinians in need and, in the light of the latest developments in the region, last week the EU announced a new humanitarian aid package for Gaza worth €120 million. We welcome the international conference, which will be co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia in New York in June.

Lastly, as regards the situation in Yemen and the Red Sea, the EU reiterates its firm support for United Nations-led peace efforts in Yemen and urges all parties, especially the Houthis, to show restraint, lower tensions and engage constructively and meaningfully with Special Envoy Grundberg towards a lasting peace and the implementation of the United Nations road map. The EU continues to support the Government of Yemen in its efforts to move ahead with reforms and to make progress towards stability in the country.

We condemn the destabilizing actions throughout the Middle East by Iran and its proxies, including through terrorist and armed groups. The EU defensive maritime operation, Operation Aspides, is maintaining its operational tempo to ensure freedom of navigation and the protection of commercial ships in the Red Sea. The EU also remains the key contributor to the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen.

We strongly condemn the detentions by Houthis of United Nations personnel and staff working for non-governmental organizations and diplomatic missions in Yemen and renew the urgent call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained.

Our full statement can be found online.

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

**Ms. De Smedt** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to first of all congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency for January and the new members of the Council on their tenure.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, and I wish to elaborate on the following points in my national capacity.

Belgium welcomes the agreement on the ceasefire and release of hostages reached between Hamas and Israel and commends the United States, Egypt and Qatar for their unwavering dedication in brokering it. We are delighted at the first steps taken this weekend to implement it. After 15 months of suffering and destruction, the agreement must bring an unbearable situation to an end by ensuring a definitive end to the hostilities, the release of all the hostages and access to, and the delivery of, humanitarian aid that meets the needs of the civilian population of Gaza. Belgium now calls on all the parties to ensure that it is fully implemented and invites the Security Council to endorse it and to outline both next-day prospects and a peace plan that supports the two-State solution. This is because a vital step has been taken, but it is only a step and a very fragile one at that. It now needs to be bolstered, and a political horizon must be set out — one that is capable of ushering in a comprehensive, just and lasting peace while galvanizing our efforts to rebuild Gaza.

(*spoke in English*)

In the absence of a concrete plan from Israel or the Palestinian Authority, let us work collectively to put an end to the negative trends on the ground that still stand in the way of peace, namely, the ability of groups such as Hamas to launch terrorist attacks against Israel and, more generally, the unlawful use of violence by Israeli or Palestinian individuals or entities; the spread of ideologies of hatred

and dehumanization; and the illegal Israeli settlements and presence in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on Israel to implement the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in this regard.

*(spoke in French)*

Let us redouble our efforts to take irreversible steps to making the two-State solution a reality. Many among Israel's and the Palestinian Authority's partners, Belgium included, are already endeavouring to do so, be it as part of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution or through the international conference to be held in June and chaired by France and Saudi Arabia. Let us also support the initiatives to ensure accountability. International law and international humanitarian law cannot be selectively applied, lest they be diluted overall.

*(spoke in English)*

As long as there is no political solution for Palestinian refugees, let us protect the mandate of the the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose work is essential. UNRWA must be able to continue working, strengthened by the recommendations of the Colonna report. The implementation of the Knesset laws, in violation of Israel's obligations under international law, represents a disastrous precedent for the multilateral system. Belgium welcomes the Secretary-General's letter of 8 January in reaction to the current situation (S/2025/18) and associates itself with the Secretary-General's considerations.

*(spoke in French)*

Let us ensure that the regional trend that emerged in Lebanon and Syria, which is fragile but full of promise, also applies to the Palestinian question. Let us seize the opportunity to leave behind the vicious circle of endless conflict by giving peace, justice and reconciliation a genuine chance.

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

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): Brazil commends the Algerian presidency for convening this timely debate and warmly welcomes the entry into force of the ceasefire in Gaza. We issue a strong call to the parties involved to respect its terms and to guarantee a permanent cessation of hostilities, the release of all hostages and the unimpeded entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. That is a fundamental step to halt the cycle of violence in Gaza, to provide the much-needed humanitarian assistance and to lay the ground for the reconstruction of that territory.

As the leading organization supporting Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides humanitarian assistance and essential services, such as healthcare and education. We must ensure that UNRWA can perform its irreplaceable work without obstruction. Preserving the invaluable mandate of UNRWA is critical to the successful implementation of the deal. We also call on the parties to fully implement the terms of the agreement — a first step towards a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territory is, as determined by the General Assembly in September (see A/ES-10/PV.55), upon the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, a precondition to achieving sustainable peace and long-term prosperity in the Middle East.

There are no alternatives. History has shown it. Annexation of the occupied land and the segregation of stateless Palestinians are neither acceptable nor sustainable options.

The present status quo has led to a perpetual state of active or latent belligerency. The international community has not been able to guarantee the protection of the

human rights of the Palestinian people, including their self-determination, or to ensure peace for the entire region. That should be the starting point of the upcoming high-level international conference on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the implementation of the two-State solution next June. Brazil is ready to engage constructively in the conference.

In the lead-up to it and beyond, we look forward to examining proposals and acting upon them in order to comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine, including General Assembly resolution ES-10/24, and to advance on the implementation of the conclusions of the International Court of Justice on the issue.

The achievement of a ceasefire will not efface the consequences of a ruthless and cruel campaign waged against the Palestinian people for more than a year. The results were more than 46,000 dead, mostly women and children; other tens of thousands maimed, seriously wounded or unaccounted for; whole families taking no active part in hostilities wiped out; hundreds of journalists, medical and humanitarian workers prevented from working, targeted and killed; civilian infrastructure, including healthcare and schools, destroyed; at least 1.9 million people across the Gaza Strip forcibly displaced; and international humanitarian law ignored and grossly violated.

That cannot go unaccounted for, be forgotten or be repeated. Ensuring justice is imperative to prevent such horrors from happening again in Gaza or elsewhere. Bereaved Israelis and Palestinians will need to learn to coexist — if not today, tomorrow, in this future of peace they all deserve.

As we look ahead, cautiously hopeful that the ceasefire now in place and, especially, the Conference in June will start an irreversible path towards sustainable peace in the Middle East, Brazil reaffirms its willingness to contribute to the two-State solution, with an independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side with Israel, in peace and security, within the 1967 borders, with a Palestinian State that includes the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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

**Mr. Soberón Guzmán (Cuba)** (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, National Community Abroad and African Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, as President of the Security Council.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered by the representatives of Uganda, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, and of Senegal, in its capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The situation in the Middle East is becoming increasingly worrisome. Despite the international call for an end to the crimes against humanity, collective punishment, apartheid and genocide perpetrated against the Palestinians by the occupying Power, Israel, we regularly hear at Security Council meetings how the number of persons killed and wounded in Gaza is rising alarmingly, while Israeli colonization practices continue in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating daily with Israel's indiscriminate attacks and violence in the occupied territories.

Cuba condemns in the strongest terms the recent Israeli offensive against the healthcare system in the Gaza Strip, the continuous assassinations and constant bombardments against the civilian population, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and the deprivation of basic services, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

At the same time, we hope that the ceasefire agreement, announced after 15 months of brutal genocide by the Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, will be respected in its three phases, allow the arrival of sufficient aid to face the unprecedented humanitarian crisis and provide a new opportunity for the resolution of this long conflict.

We call for the immediate admission of Palestine as a Member State of the United Nations, a key step in redressing the historical injustice committed against the Palestinian people and moving towards a definitive resolution of the conflict. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution, based on the creation of two States that allows the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to have a free, independent and sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, including the right of return of refugees, is essential in order to achieve peace and stability in the region.

Israeli aggression is expanding in the Middle East region, with total impunity. At the same time, Israel continues to deliberately attack workers of the United Nations system and threatens the humanitarian work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, without any consequences for such acts.

Under the false pretext of self-defence, with the unconditional political, military and financial support of the United States and the complicity of its allies, Israel indiscriminately bombs Yemen, illegally usurps territories of the Syrian Arab Republic, violates the ceasefire in Lebanon and threatens the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Security Council's inaction in the face of Israel's threats to international peace and security is untenable. We urge this organ to enforce its own resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, without further delay.

Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nations of the Middle East, without external interference, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, are essential for the achievement of peace in the region. Every minute of impunity, passivity and silence will cost more innocent lives. It is time for the South to act with unity and determination.

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

**Ms. Zoghbi** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank the sisterly country of Algeria for convening this open debate regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, who presided over this debate, and I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

This regular open debate regarding the situation in the Middle East is different from the previous one (see S/PV.9763). The situation in the region has shifted and turned upside down, as described by His Excellency Mr. Joseph Aoun, President of Lebanon, in his inauguration speech. He described it as a Middle East earthquake that saw coalitions cracking and regimes falling.

Since the most recent debate, there have been drastic changes in Lebanon. After two years of an institutional vacuum, on 9 January Lebanon elected His Excellency Mr. Joseph Aoun as President of Lebanon. Judge Nawaf Salam was designated the Prime Minister in order to form a Government, which, he promised, would fulfil the aspirations of the Lebanese people and build the State that all Lebanese deserved. All efforts are now focused on forming this new Government.

The visit of Secretary-General António Guterres and the visits of the President Emmanuel Macron of France and President Nikos Christodoulides of Cyprus and that of many other delegations were made in support of the long-awaited momentum.

As we meet today one week before the 60-day deadline agreed upon in the announcement of the cessation of hostilities and related commitments on enhanced security arrangements and towards the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we would like to reiterate our commitment to the announcement and the necessity for Israel to respect its obligations under the agreement and other relevant international resolutions, particularly resolution 1701 (2006). Lebanon stresses that the ongoing Israeli land and air violations, particularly the demolition of houses and the destruction of border villages, runs entirely counter to the announcement and is a continued violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the will of the international community.

Lebanon reiterates the need for Israel to withdraw from all occupied Lebanese territories without delay within 60 days. Failing that, and without respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders, there can be no sustainable security or stability. Lebanon stresses the need for the Lebanese Armed Forces to continue to deploy throughout villages in the south and to work to consolidate its deployment and secure important positions, in coordination with the forces of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the five-party monitoring commission to oversee the implementation of the announcement of the cessation of hostilities. Lebanon has repeatedly affirmed, through the Lebanese army, its readiness and capability to deploy in the south and to fulfil all its obligations, in accordance with the announcement. Lebanon commends UNIFIL forces on their steadfastness while under attack on their positions and underscores that there is full coordination between UNIFIL and the Lebanese army.

With regard to Gaza, Lebanon welcomes the entry into force of the ceasefire agreement yesterday, marking the close of a bloodstained chapter in the Palestinian people's long history of woe. Lebanon expresses the hope that the ceasefire will last and that Israel will earnestly abide by it, given that Israel has accustomed us to its evasion of its commitments and its rejection of international resolutions. The ongoing attacks and violations of the cessation of hostilities in the south of Lebanon may well provide the best proof of that. Lebanon appreciates the tremendous efforts made by the mediators, namely, the United States of America, Qatar and the Arab Republic of Egypt, to reach an agreement. Lebanon hopes that agreement will pave the way to reaching a definitive and just solution to the Palestinian question, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted in Beirut in 2002; to an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders; to the end of the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories; and to a settlement of the Palestine refugee question and the return of Palestine refugees to their country. In that connection, Lebanon also looks forward to the convening of the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, to be chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and France.

Considering the rapid regional changes taking place all around us, it is important for Lebanon to stress that the recent developments in Syria have repercussions on the state of affairs in the Middle East in general and in Lebanon in particular. We underscore that there is a historic opportunity to address all pending issues between the two countries, particularly to secure the border and to prevent illegal human smuggling. Lebanon also attaches special importance to the question of missing persons and displaced Syrians as issues that have existential repercussions for Lebanon. We therefore stress that cooperation will be necessary to deal with that crisis and to work to repatriate displaced Syrians to their country.

Through wars, interference, aggression and greed, Lebanon is still Lebanon — buffeted by the winds, it remains a resilient, tenacious and proud nation, its roots deeply entrenched in spite of the many storms. It is a nation whose people are today driven by hope and determination to rebuild what was destroyed and to work to chart a new course on which to move forward towards a better tomorrow.

Today Lebanon is striving to take firm steps towards a new phase of its history, and it needs all the support of the international community and the United Nations. Likewise, the region as a whole faces unprecedented circumstances, presenting us with an opportunity that must not be squandered. It is an auspicious moment that demands earnest work to lay the foundation for lasting stability and to support the countries of the region in their efforts to achieve the prosperity and well-being that our peoples deserve.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts and your wise and successful steering of the Council's work this month. We are pleased to welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of sisterly Algeria, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, and we thank him for presiding over this important meeting.

The region is witnessing major political transformations that will have repercussions on countries in the region for decades to come. After Syrians inaugurated a new historical phase and began working to create a better future for their homeland, the Lebanese elected a President and nominated a Prime Minister, in an opening that we hope will bring good, prosperity and stability to Lebanon and its fraternal people.

All eyes remain on the Palestinian people, who have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the decades-long Israeli occupation and the brutal crimes of which the international community has witnessed successive chapters over the past 15 months. Those crimes have not been limited to systematic killing and destruction, forced displacement, the bombing of hospitals, schools and places of worship, the targeting of medical personnel and journalists and other gross violations of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, but have even included attacks on the United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations operating in Gaza and their staff.

With the approval of the ceasefire agreement, which the States Members of the United Nations have awaited for more than a year and for which intensive efforts have been made within and outside the Council, Syria hopes that the agreement will restore security and tranquillity to the Palestinian people and that it will be complemented by a process that guarantees the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, self-determination and the establishment of their independent, sovereign State with full membership in the United Nations. In that context, we would like to commend the Egyptian-Qatari mediation efforts to reach the agreement.

My country, Syria, reaffirms its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and expresses its rejection of the practices of the Israeli occupation authorities aimed at undermining the Agency, including the issuance by the occupation authorities of laws that are incompatible with the Agency's mandate, conferred upon it by the General Assembly, and with the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Syria calls on the international community to support UNRWA and enable it to continue to fulfil its mandate of assisting Palestinians in their homeland and in host countries, including my own country, Syria.

My country, Syria, expresses its condemnation and rejects the promotion by some official Israeli accounts of what they call the historical map of Israel, which shows parts of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the West Bank within its so-called borders. Syria stresses that the publication of such maps does not contribute to the security and stability sought by the peoples of the region. Rather, it reflects the intentions

of the Israeli occupation authorities to perpetuate their occupation and persist with their hostile approach and their violations of international laws and agreements.

As the Syrian people celebrated the victory of their revolution, Israeli occupation forces violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic beginning in December by crossing the lines of the area of separation and conducting an incursion into large areas of Syrian territory in Jabal Al-Shaykh, Qunaytirah governorate and surrounding areas, as far as Rif Dimashq and Dara'a governorates. That Israeli military incursion was accompanied by hundreds of raids on a large number of civilian and military sites, scientific centres and infrastructure owned by the Syrian people. The Israeli occupation forces have piled up dirt barriers, bulldozed land and destroyed infrastructure for essential services. They attacked the residents of the Syrian villages and towns they entered, confiscated their properties and displaced a number of them, in flagrant violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions. That requires condemnation and urgent action by the Security Council to end those aggressive Israeli practices immediately and unconditionally. My country categorically rejects all allegations by the occupation authorities to justify their violations of the sovereignty and integrity of Syrian territory.

The new Syrian Administration has reiterated that Syria will pursue a policy that contributes to the stability and prosperity of the region and that it does not intend to engage in new conflicts. However, that does not mean in any way that Syria will abandon its inalienable rights in the occupied Syrian Golan or that it will accept the Israeli attempts to establish a new occupation on Syrian territory.

Syria calls on the Security Council to compel the Israeli occupation entity to withdraw from the territories on which there have been recent incursions by its forces and to stop its aggressions against the residents and against the Syrian people in the occupied Syrian Golan. Syria stresses the need to end the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan, occupied since 1967, and to fully restore it through the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, foremost of which are resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

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

**Mr. Albanai** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), namely, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and my country, the State of Kuwait. I also would like to express our solidarity with the statement delivered by the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

Before I begin, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and wish you, Sir, success in steering the Council's work. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable briefing this morning.

The GCC countries welcome the statement issued in Doha, on 15 January, on the agreement reached between the two parties to the conflict in Gaza, which includes a ceasefire in Gaza, an exchange of prisoners, the return of sustainable calm and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to our Palestinian brothers. The GCC countries commend the sincere mediation efforts of the State of Qatar in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States of America. The GCC countries stress the importance of the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement throughout all its phases, the ceasefire agreement becoming permanent and the delivery of humanitarian assistance and Israel's fulfilment of all its obligations in that regard.

We welcome and commend the efforts of the Ministerial Committee assigned by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit to put an end to Israeli aggression

on Gaza and its shuttle visits across the world for more than a year. For more than a year, the world witnessed the chaos resulting from the Israeli occupation forces' actions, violating the sovereignty of States, endangering the security of the region and violating the principles of international law. The international community must stand on the side of the law and assume its responsibility to stop those practices which threaten the future of the region and its residents.

The Gulf Cooperation Council stresses the need to take serious measures to maintain regional security and stability in accordance with international law. The Gulf Cooperation Council condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and the targeting of Palestinian civilians and their forced displacement. It affirms its principled and firm support for the brotherly Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and other areas. We stress the need to put an end to the blockade on the Gaza Strip, alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians and ensure the delivery of all humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians.

In that context, the GCC emphasizes that Israel must bear full responsibility for its ongoing violations and attacks against innocent civilians, which have resulted in the death of more than 45,000 civilians, mostly women and children. They are war crimes and crimes against humanity under international humanitarian law. In that regard, the GCC welcomes the decision of the International Criminal Court issued on 21 November 2024.

The unprecedented practices by that rogue State that we are witnessing today require the solidarity of the international community to put an end to those actions, which persist and are getting worse as a result of the impunity with which they are being undertaken. Impunity undermines justice and what we witnessed at the end of last year in the Israeli Knesset regarding the adoption of legislation prohibiting the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the occupied territories is a direct result of the impunity that the regime is enjoying, which has encouraged the regime to continue violating norms and customs for more than a year. That is a clear violation and Article 95 of the Charter of the United Nations must apply in this situation.

In that context, it is useful to point out and clarify to the international community that the occupying Power's dream of eliminating UNRWA is not new but rather a long-term strategy adopted by extremists with a view to eliminating the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land, which is currently occupied. Therefore, let it be clear to everyone that the desire to destroy UNRWA is an Israeli machination aimed at obliterating the Palestinian identity, erasing the rights of the Palestinian people and ensuring that the international community fails to pressure Israel to reach a two-State solution and implement the binding Security Council resolutions in that regard.

UNRWA has been and will continue to be one of the crowning achievements of this Organization, as it is the backbone and cornerstone of humanitarian work in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is an indispensable Agency. Therefore, we must all affirm with one voice the importance of the role of UNRWA as a pillar of regional stability and a lifeline that carries with it hope and opportunity for the millions of Palestine refugees served by the Agency, including women and children. Any interruption or suspension of the Agency's vital work will result in serious humanitarian, political and security consequences. We would like to express our condolences to Mr. António Guterres, the Secretary-General; to Mr. Philip Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA; and to the families of the 233 UNRWA employees who lost their lives owing to the barbaric actions of the occupying Power, its continued brutal bombardment of the Gaza Strip and its countless attacks on the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

In that regard, we demand that humanitarian workers be provided with all necessary protection. We reject any attempts to undermine UNRWA's mandate, alter

its mission or target its personnel. We call on the international community to continue supporting the Agency in implementing its mandate on the political, financial and humanitarian fronts until the very last Palestinian refugees return to their homeland.

In the coming days the unacceptable laws that the Israeli Knesset has enacted banning UNRWA's activities will enter into force. In that regard, we want to highlight the fact that 123 Member States of the United Nations — in other words, two thirds of the membership — have joined together to sign a statement of shared commitments in support of UNRWA politically. Along with senior United Nations officials, they see the danger threatening UNRWA, while the other side views its action as a great victory. Regardless of their different ideological and religious affiliations, geographic regions and races, those States are conveying a single message — that the occupying Power's actions against UNRWA set a dangerous precedent.

And yet despite all that, paralysis prevails in the Security Council and geopolitical differences continue to be the primary driver of its decisions. While we condemn the occupying entity and deplore the paralysis in the Council, we would like to applaud those Member States that are turning their energies towards the General Assembly, an organ that brings together all Member States. Norway launched a laudable initiative that resulted in the Assembly's adoption of its resolution 79/232, requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on Israel's obligations in relation to the presence and activities of the United Nations, other international organizations and third countries that provide humanitarian and development assistance to the Palestinian people. We commend our friend the Republic of Türkiye and the many other States that sent letters last October to the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council, calling for an end to arms transfers to Israel.

That leads me to another important issue. Given the paralysis in the Council, and the fact that it is not shouldering its primary responsibility, which is first and foremost the maintenance of international peace and security — together with its reluctance to take a clear and explicit position owing to various delegations' double standards — it follows that the General Assembly is capable of assuming that responsibility and moving forward in order to achieve a lasting, comprehensive and just peace.

We would also like to insist on recognition of the advisory opinion (see A/78/968) regarding the legal consequences arising from Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, that the International Court of Justice issued last year in response to the General Assembly's request in December 2022. The Court's clear, unequivocal and evidence-based opinion dispelled all interpretations, ambiguities and fallacies that some parties had promoted. On the basis of law, it stipulates that the occupying Power is duty-bound to put an immediate end to the occupation that has been ongoing since 1967. It must also end the arbitrary practices aimed at Palestinians in the occupied territory, return their property and compensate them for the damages resulting from Israel's illegal practices. The Israeli war machine has not ceased its acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement against defenceless Palestinians, practices that have been directed not only at the people themselves but that have affected schools, mosques, universities, churches, residential housing and civilian infrastructure. Journalists and United Nations employees have been targeted in the Gaza Strip.

We therefore call on the Security Council to implement its resolutions 2735 (2024), 2720 (2023) and 2712 (2023) regarding the ceasefire in Gaza, the return of Palestinians to their homes, the distribution of adequate humanitarian assistance and the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip. The Gulf Cooperation Council requests that the Council adopt a binding resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter that explicitly covers the immediate ceasefire and an end to the genocide and enforced displacement of Palestinians in order to ensure that they can resume normal life in Gaza.

In conclusion, the Gulf Cooperation Council would like to highlight its principled and unswerving position. We stand with the Palestinian people. We emphasize that the main cause of the current conflict is the existence of an occupation with no end in sight. If we want peace and security, the Palestinian question must be settled based on the establishment of an independent sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with what has been agreed on and endorsed by the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, including those of the Security Council, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

We support a comprehensive plan for the Palestinian Authority's return to the Gaza Strip and reject any measures designed to separate Gaza from the West Bank. Any proposals for the future of Gaza must be made in the context of a unified Palestinian State that has a clear path towards the implementation of a two-State solution. We would like to request that States ensure that they participate at the highest possible level in the high-level international conference for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the implementation of a two-State solution, to be held in June under the auspices of the General Assembly and led by France and Saudi Arabia.

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

**Mr. Szczerski** (Poland): I would like to start by thanking the Algerian presidency for convening this meeting and the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his comprehensive briefing.

I would like to touch briefly on issues concerning the situation in the Middle East that Poland considers vital and urgent.

First, the protection of civilians must be a priority. International humanitarian law must be upheld in all circumstances and must not be violated. We look forward to the full implementation of the recent ceasefire agreement in Gaza and hope that it will lead to the release of all hostages and improved humanitarian conditions for the Palestinians in Gaza.

We commend Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their diplomatic efforts and urge all parties to resolve their differences with goodwill and through dialogue. In that regard, we would like to emphasize that in the long term, a sustainable road map aimed at a two-State solution is essential to achieving stability and lasting peace in the region. Poland is committed to de-escalation in the Middle East and in the Gulf, recognizing that support for non-State actors fuels further instability. Furthermore, we call on Iran to immediately cease its transfers of weapons to Russia, which pose a threat to broader European security. With regard to the rebuilding of post-Al-Assad Syria, we must pursue a Syrian-led political process that respects the people's aspirations and adheres to international law. The protection of human rights, including for women and minorities, will be critical to a stable future for the country.

On top of Poland's financial support for the region in 2024, we provided humanitarian assistance amounting to almost \$10 million to countries in the Middle East — Palestine, Lebanon and Syria — mainly through United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Mine Action Service, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNESCO and UNICEF. In addition, we assisted the region through Polish aid projects, implemented by Polish non-governmental organizations, Polish embassies, the representative's office and the Polish military contingent of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Palestine is at the top of Poland's official development assistance priority countries. Our efforts concentrate on ensuring access to healthcare and improving its quality, human capital development and entrepreneurship. In 2024, Poland contributed more than €2 million to UNRWA alone. In that regard, Poland

remains deeply concerned about the prospect of the imminent implementation of the Knesset bills affecting UNRWA, as there is no viable alternative to the Agency in Gaza. We call on all United Nations members to uphold UNRWA's mandate.

The stakes continue to be high, as the fragility of the situation in the Middle East remains significant. People who have already suffered through so much urgently need and deserve lasting peace and stability. As tensions rise, the international community must act responsibly to confront these challenges, as inaction could have far-reaching and severe consequences.

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

**Mr. Vegas Torres** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing in this forum my country's satisfaction at the agreement on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of hostages and at the resumption of aid for the relief of the humanitarian situation, recognizing and appreciating the valuable mediation efforts made by the Governments of Qatar, the United States and Egypt. I am also pleased to convey our satisfaction at the recent release of three Israeli hostages. That is particularly important in a context of increased hostilities on various fronts throughout the Middle East and the threat that poses to international peace and security.

In a context of protracted conflict, Peru is confident that that progress will lead to a sustainable process of reconstruction for Gaza and the safe and dignified return of the millions of Palestinians who have been forced to flee their homes. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's call in the meeting this morning for strong support for all efforts aimed at creating the conditions for that reconstruction. The beginning of the implementation of the agreement, based on the commitment of the parties and the work of the mediating countries, represents a crucial step towards the long-awaited détente and alleviation of the humanitarian crisis in the region.

In that context, Peru reiterates the importance of guaranteeing the essential humanitarian work carried out in the Middle East by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and therefore strongly rejects any action that prevents its full operation. As indicated by the Secretary-General in his letters to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council in December 2024 (S/2024/892) and January 2025 (S/2025/18) respectively, the work of that Agency constitutes the backbone of any humanitarian response in Gaza, and its role in providing essential assistance to the Palestinians cannot be replaced. In that regard, Peru supports the position expressed by the Council in its press release of 30 October 2024 on respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of United Nations facilities and personnel (see SC/15874). In addition, while respecting the principle of neutrality, Peru also supports internal investigation into the functioning of the Agency and the possible adoption of corrective measures, if necessary.

While the agreement reached represents an important step forward, the seriously deteriorated humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip calls for the further mobilization of international cooperation to comprehensively address the alarming levels of food insecurity and lack of essential services, in particular among the most vulnerable populations. As Secretary-General Guterres stressed this morning, we agree that it is crucial that the ceasefire removes the significant political and security-related obstacles that hinder the delivery of aid, aimed at alleviating the prevailing needs of the Palestinian civilian population.

The situation in the Middle East is extremely complex, and a long-term solution requires important political decisions to fulfil the commitments that we have made. Among other indispensable elements, that implies the two-State solution, which must be implemented in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular those of the Security Council and the decisions of

the International Court of Justice, given their binding nature. The aim is for Palestine and Israel to be two sovereign States that coexist peacefully, with internationally recognized borders, and both being full members of this Organization.

Lastly, Peru urges all Member States to join forces to strengthen dialogue and multilateralism, resolutely supporting the work of the United Nations as a whole. Only through renewed commitment and concerted action will we be able to avoid a repetition of the events that call for our reflection today, thereby preserving the noblest purpose of this Organization, which is the construction of a more just and peaceful future for all.

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

**Ms. Brattested** (Norway): Let me join others in welcoming the long-overdue ceasefire agreement in Gaza. We express our sincere gratitude to Qatar, Egypt and the United States for their tireless efforts to make it happen. It is now crucial that all parties respect all parts of the agreement, that weapons are laid down, that hostages are released and that enough life-saving aid reaches the people of Gaza.

The ceasefire agreement is a first important step. Still, even if it holds, it does not provide lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The coming three months will be critical for Gaza. Access to Gaza with the delivery of assistance and services is essential. Gaza is a part of Palestine and must be governed and rebuilt by the Palestinians under one unified and legitimate Palestinian Government. We, the international community, must support the Palestinian Government in that endeavour. We must support the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to reform and streamline governmental services and in building the Palestinian State. Now is the time to expedite our work towards lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Last week, 85 countries and organizations met in Oslo for the third follow-up meeting of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution to do exactly that. Facilitating the realization of the two-State solution is the only way to bring about peace, stability and security for Israel, Palestine and the region.

The war after the terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023 has left Gaza in ruins. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel's military action, ill-treatment and settler violence continue to inflict harm on Palestinian communities. In just a few days, the Knesset legislation preventing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East from working in Palestine is expected to come into effect. If implemented, the laws will effectively cripple the key humanitarian actor in the middle of a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. It will jeopardize the provision of crucial services in the West Bank and further increase the risk of regional instability. Norway condemns those laws by the Knesset and urges Israel to repeal them. Just before the end of the year, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that asked the International Court of Justice to clarify Israel's obligations to ensure and facilitate the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance and basic services to the Palestinian civilian population (resolution 79/232). The overwhelming support for that resolution sends a clear message that the international community will protect the operations of the United Nations, of international organizations and of third States in the occupied Palestinian territory. No country is exempt from its international legal obligations. No country is above the law. If we — the international community — do not stand up to those who deliberately disrespect international law, we are heading down a very dangerous path. We will continue to remind Israel of its obligations under international law, including the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice.

A new year marks a new beginning. We saw in Syria how quickly the situation can change. The ceasefire in Gaza has created some momentum. In these times of uncertainty, let us act with determination to ensure respect for international law and prevent further suffering in the region.

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

**Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh): We thank the Algerian presidency for convening this quarterly open debate.

First and foremost, we welcome the announcement of the ceasefire agreement. We sincerely hope that it will stop the killings and destruction in Gaza. It no doubt comes as an immediate relief for the people of Gaza and for the international community, which has been demanding an end to the killings and massacre in Gaza since the beginning of the military campaign 15 months ago. But in spite of the calls, the genocide, atrocities and mass killings perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians have deeply wounded humankind. The consequences will be borne by future generations. In the past 15 months, more than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed, 70 per cent of them women and children. The people are facing a humanitarian disaster and are in dire need of life-saving assistance. We must resume the humanitarian assistance immediately. In that regard, we emphasize the need to strengthen the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is a lifeline for the Palestinians, and to resist any attempt to obstruct its operations. We urge the international community to find fresh resources and funding to help the men, women and children affected.

We would once again like to refer to the statement of the Secretary-General that the situation did not evolve in a vacuum. The world has been witnessing genocidal killings, a continued illegal occupation and violations of international law in Palestine for decades. Countless United Nations resolutions could not bring an end to the occupation, genocide and war crimes. We need to take appropriate action to restore the Council's credibility. In that regard, we urge the Council to take immediate action to recommend the admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations.

As responsible members of the United Nations, we need to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes. We want to once again point to the decision issued by the International Criminal Court on the war in Gaza and urge the international community to stand with the Court and help implement its rulings. We also call for upholding its orders. The world will not forgive us if we set a precedent of inaction after witnessing such gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We believe that Member States' sovereignty and territorial integrity are inviolable. In that connection, we condemn the recent Israeli aggression in Lebanon and call for ensuring that the ceasefire can be sustained. We also condemn Israel's occupation of Syrian land after the change of Government in Damascus. Israel must end its illegal occupation in Syria. The people of Syria should decide their future and bring peace, prosperity and an end to hostilities.

Once again, before the Council, we urge all to cease all forms of armed hostilities and violent repression against the Palestinian people and other nations in the region. Bangladesh will continue its advocacy for the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. We believe that is the only sustainable solution to the crisis in the Middle East.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

**Mr. Dang** (Viet Nam): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the Algerian presidency for convening this important open debate.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Uganda on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We welcome the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, announced on 15 January 2025, and the arrangements for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon that

have been in effect since 26 November of last year, which are positive developments that have substantial potential for bringing lasting peace to Gaza and the wider region.

Viet Nam joins other delegations in commending the tireless diplomatic efforts that helped broker this much-anticipated ceasefire, which is a testament to the power of dialogue and diplomacy. Although caution continues to be advisable and concerns remain about its fragility, the hard-earned truce is expected to put an end to one of the most devastating conflicts of our time. At the same time, it must be seen not as an end in itself but rather as a catalyst for addressing the long-standing issues at the heart of the conflict. In that connection, my delegation would like to highlight the following points.

First, while urging all the parties concerned to fully comply with the ceasefire agreement and to exercise the utmost restraint in order to avoid a recurrence of the violence, Viet Nam reiterates its call for strict adherence to international law and the Charter of the United Nations and for full respect for the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly and the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice.

Secondly, in executing and upholding the ceasefire, all the parties must ensure the protection of civilians and critical civilian infrastructure and the eventual release of all hostages. We emphasize the importance of ensuring the rapid, unimpeded and uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid to the entire territory of Gaza. In that regard, Viet Nam reaffirms its appreciation and unwavering support for the indispensable role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing essential services and assistance to Palestinians in distress. In addition, there should be no delay in addressing the economic and development needs of the people in Gaza. A sustainable peace cannot be built on a foundation of despair. Viet Nam supports initiatives aimed at rebuilding Gaza, revitalizing its economy and creating opportunities for its population, especially young people.

Thirdly, the situation in Gaza cannot be viewed in isolation. It is part of a broader context of instability and tensions that have plagued the Middle East for decades. We must recognize that peace in Gaza and Palestine is deeply interconnected with stability in the wider Middle East. A just and lasting peace in the Middle East can be achieved only through the realization of a two-State solution, with an independent State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. That goal requires the collective will of the international community and the unwavering support of the Council.

In conclusion, I wish to recall the recent meeting between the President of Viet Nam with Professor Riad Al-Malki, Special Envoy of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, three weeks ago in Hanoi, in which the Vietnamese Head of State reaffirmed the strong and enduring bonds of friendship between the two peoples and reiterated Viet Nam's unwavering solidarity and support for the Palestinian people's aspirations towards peace and justice.

In that spirit, Viet Nam stands ready to join hands with the international community to turn the promise of the latest ceasefire into lasting peace for the people of Palestine, Israel and the broader region.

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

**Mr. Vinhas (Portugal):** Since the most recent open debate on this topic (see S/PV.9763), many developments have taken place in the Middle East — and even some breakthroughs. Let me start by greatly welcoming a long-awaited and much-needed ceasefire in Gaza. Portugal underlines the importance of the efforts of the mediators — Qatar, Egypt and the United States, including of the incoming

Administration. The entry into force of the ceasefire agreement yesterday was vital. If fully implemented by the parties, the ceasefire is a beacon of hope for peace and a better future in the region.

We also welcome the fact that the ceasefire in Lebanon is holding, and welcome the constructive role of the United Nations, as demonstrated by the remarks of the Secretary-General in his visit to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon last Friday. The recent presidential election and the nomination of a new Prime Minister are important steps towards strengthening Lebanese sovereignty and regional stabilization.

The fall of the Al-Assad regime in Syria in December could be a turning point for the country and the region, presenting an opportunity for Syrians to live in an inclusive and prosperous society where individual rights are respected and the rule of law becomes the new norm. In that endeavour, within the ongoing Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, the United Nations has an opportunity to play a role in many different arenas, such as on political, humanitarian and reconstruction issues and on ensuring accountability. Those positive developments come after an unbearable toll of violence, death and fear, whose main victims were innocent civilians — every single one of them deserving our respect and grief.

In Gaza, after 15 months of war, one that will go down in history as the deadliest in modern times, we must make sure that nothing similar will ever happen again, neither another 7 October against Israelis nor the indiscriminate killing of innocent Palestinian civilians. In that vein, we strongly support the parameters of the ceasefire agreed between Israel and Hamas, namely, the release of all hostages and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops. A full implementation of the ceasefire is critical to break the cycle of violence and to shape the current political landscape into a more productive and positive environment for all — one that allows both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and security.

It is, therefore, due time to learn the lessons from the past and turn the page of this conflict and move towards a wider and sustainable peace agreement. Portugal reaffirms its full support to the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, an initiative launched at the margins of the high-level week in September, and to further efforts for the establishment of a Palestinian State, a core element envisaged by the international community for the Palestinian question.

The priority should be to ensure that humanitarian assistance flows to Gaza, with full and unhindered access, ensuring the distribution of goods inside the territory, and to create conditions for the resumption of private commercial and economic activities in and into the Gaza Strip.

To start the reconstruction of the territory as soon as possible should also be one of our primary concerns, given the importance of sanitary, healthcare and education infrastructure for the stabilization of society in Gaza. That is a condition *sine qua non* to push back against radicalism and extremism amid an exceptionally traumatized society.

In that regard, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains the backbone of humanitarian assistance in the territory, possibly the last institutionalized work force on the ground, and its mandate should be protected when it matters the most. Portugal will continue to support UNRWA, as the Agency's mandate remains indispensable and irreplaceable, and its existence continues to be deeply intertwined with a sustainable political solution of the conflict.

We reaffirm our full and unwavering support to the Secretary-General, at a time when his good offices are needed in the Middle East.

Finally, Portugal welcomes the designation ad interim of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and acknowledges the professionalism and dedication of Mr. Tor Wennesland during his term in office.

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

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The escalation of violence and hostilities in the Middle East region over the past year and the consequences of such acts on international peace and security have reached levels not seen in a long time in the Security Council. In addition to the devastation in Gaza, the increase in attacks in the West Bank and Yemen and the radical change of circumstances in Syria are testing the United Nations response for the future of the region.

On the most recent developments, my country welcomes the ceasefire agreement and the release of hostages in the Gaza Strip, thanks to the mediation of Egypt, Qatar and the United States. We underscore the importance of ensuring the full implementation of this agreement and of reaching a permanent ceasefire. After months of paralysis, the Security Council must now follow up on its implementation, but also complement it with humanitarian efforts.

Mexico reaffirms the Secretary-General's call to seize this opportunity to open a path to a better future for the people of both Palestine and Israel and for the region as a whole. It is imperative that the current agreement removes the political and security obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian aid and sets the stage for progress towards the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

Fifteen months since the outbreak of hostilities, more than 46,000 Palestinians — mostly women and children — have tragically lost their lives and 110,000 people have been wounded. It is simply an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. It is essential to support and ensure the assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the backbone of humanitarian assistance.

As Mexico has said in all forums: the political and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be achieved only through a two-State solution that enables the consolidation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, within secure and internationally recognized pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and that simultaneously addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns.

As I noted, it is not only Gaza that is the focus of tensions in the Middle East. The current situation of violence in Syria is also of great concern. Mexico echoes the Secretary-General's call for all parties to work with the Special Envoy for Syria to develop an inclusive and comprehensive approach in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) focused on restoring Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, as well as on meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Mexico also noted the importance of preventing the regrouping of Da'esh and other terrorist groups in Syria, in the framework of full respect for international human rights law.

A few hundred kilometres south of Syria, we have also seen disturbing reciprocal attacks between Israel and the Houthis, ramping up the cycle of violence and worsening the critical humanitarian situation of approximately 18 million people in Yemen. Mexico condemns the attack on Sana'a International Airport, which endangered the life of the Director-General of the World Health Organization and those of the members of the high-level United Nations delegation accompanying him.

My country reiterates the need to comply with international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of the civilian population and civilian infrastructure. Mexico

demands the immediate release of detained humanitarian personnel. Moreover, in line with resolution 2722 (2024), the Houthis must immediately cease all attacks, which impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights and freedoms. In that regard, we welcome the resolution adopted last week (resolution 2768 (2025)).

In conclusion, I reiterate Mexico's unwavering belief in the peaceful settlement of disputes. My country will continue to support all efforts to establish a lasting peace in the region, based on mutual respect and full compliance with international law.

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

**Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I also extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his important briefing.

At the outset, we hope that the year 2025 will be a one of improvements in the political and humanitarian situation in the Middle East. There is momentum on the ground. In Lebanon, the ceasefire agreement is being implemented, and we congratulate Lebanon on the election of the new President as an important milestone towards stability and development in the country. Syria is also making progress on its political transition.

Significantly, a Gaza ceasefire-hostage deal, a deal that we have all wanted to see, is now in place. That is a critical first step towards ending the devastating conflict and the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and de-escalating tensions in the region, which Japan has consistently called for. While deeply regretting the enormous number of civilian casualties, including aid workers, and the immense human suffering over the past 15 months, Japan values the parties' will to end the agony. We appreciate all parties involved, including Egypt, Qatar and the United States, in achieving that breakthrough. The release of the three hostages yesterday is long-awaited welcome news, but many others are still waiting to reunite with their loved ones. The agreement must be implemented swiftly, steadily and in good faith. The unbearable plight must end immediately. It is our sincere hope that the agreement will pave the way for long-term stability in Israel and Palestine and beyond.

At this historic juncture, let me make three points.

First, the ceasefire will expand aid delivery throughout Gaza. Now is the time to scale up our humanitarian relief supply and help the Palestinians awaken from the nightmare as soon as possible. Since October 2023, Japan has contributed a total of \$230 million for humanitarian assistance in Palestine, and we will continue to play our part. Israel should ensure an environment conducive to humanitarian activities, particularly by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, now that the implementation of the gravely concerning bills against the Agency is approaching.

Secondly, our concerted efforts are necessary to restore Gaza. Housing and infrastructure are destroyed. Social order has collapsed. In order to realize the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinians to live in dignity and to prevent another 7 October, we must swiftly develop a post-conflict plan, including early recovery and reconstruction.

Thirdly, we must lay the foundation for a two-State solution. Japan opposes any actions that would run counter to that vision, including Israeli settlement in the West Bank. We also remain steadfastly committed to revitalizing the Palestinian Authority, both politically and financially, so that it can effectively govern both Gaza and the West Bank.

We cannot bring back those who have been tragically lost in this conflict, but there are still plenty of lives that we can save. The cycle of bloodshed must end. A window of opportunity is here, and we must not lose it.

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

**Mr. Al-Fatlawi** (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I highly value the efforts of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria in presiding over the Security Council this month, and its initiative to convene this meeting, which once again sheds light on the Palestinian question. That question is one of justice and dignity for a people who continue to suffer under the longest occupation in recent history. That issue is the root cause of conflict in the region and key to regional peace, security and stability.

We also express our appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and National Community Abroad of Algeria, for presiding over this meeting. In addition, we appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General and his repeated calls to end the war, lift the blockade imposed on the Palestinian people and ensure the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance. His stance reflects the fundamental values upon which the Organization was built.

We meet today against the backdrop of the tragedy being endured by the Palestinian people. They are bearing the brunt of war, ongoing blockade, systematic starvation and deliberate destruction of infrastructure and inhumane practices perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces. That has compounded the suffering of millions of Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip, large parts of which have been destroyed by repeated aggression over the past 15 months. Those inhumane circumstances require urgent attention and for the Council to take a firm stance on them, given that they constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

Despite the Council's failure to take decisive steps to stop the war, emboldening the occupation authorities to continue committing more crimes undeterred, we value the efforts made by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, leading to a ceasefire agreement, as the first step towards ending the human suffering of the resilient and long-suffering Palestinian people. Nevertheless, the agreement is not the end. There is an urgent need to undertake immediate, concerted efforts to rebuild the Strip; provide reparations for the destruction wrought by the war; create conditions conducive to the return of displaced Palestinians to their homes and ensure their protection and dignity. That need constitutes a humanitarian and moral imperative.

In view of that, Iraq calls for the implementation of its initiative to establish an international fund for the reconstruction of Gaza, to coordinate international efforts and provide the necessary resources for reconstruction. We look forward to seeing the international community redouble its efforts to provide the necessary support, and we call on the Security Council to support the initiative and work to implement it. We also call on the Security Council to shoulder its legal and moral responsibility regarding the Palestinian question and to work in earnest to end the Israeli occupation, ensure the implementation of the relevant resolutions and address the root causes of the conflict.

In that vein, we reaffirm the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968). The advisory opinion affirmed the illegality of the Israeli occupation and called for an end to the occupation in all its aspects and for the Palestinian people to be granted its inalienable rights. That advisory opinion is an international legal reference which the Security Council and the international community should implement with all the necessary measures.

We would like to seize this opportunity to express our full appreciation for the efforts undertaken by international humanitarian organizations to provide relief for the Palestinian people. We reject the attacks on United Nations agencies, including

on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which represents a lifeline for millions of Palestinian refugees. Iraq has provided financial support to allow UNRWA to continue carrying out its tasks. We express our gratitude to its staff who continue to provide humanitarian assistance under very difficult circumstances. The continued support of UNRWA is a priority to ensure that the needs of Palestinian refugees are met. Attacking such agencies is a direct threat to human security and exacerbates the suffering of the Palestinian people. We call upon the international community to provide the necessary support to UNRWA so that it continues to provide its vital services.

We reaffirm our commitment to support the just Palestinian cause and the aspiration of the Palestinian people to freedom, independence and ending the occupation while fulfilling their hopes to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. Those are legitimate aspirations that require the steadfast support of the international community. Disregarding those aspirations or delaying their implementation will only deepen the tragedy and exacerbate tensions in the region. The Government of Iraq has always supported the Palestinian people by providing humanitarian assistance and meeting the basic and medical needs of the Palestinian people, following the blockade and the war launched by the occupation forces.

We strongly condemn the attacks of the Israeli military on Syrian territories. That is a blatant violation of the sovereignty of a Member State of the United Nations and a dangerous threat to regional stability and security. Those attacks are a continuation of the occupation approach, which violates the sovereignty of States and international laws. We call for respect for the unity and sovereignty of Syria over its territories and support for it in building its future, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We support respect for the will of the Syrian people to change and choose their form of government, through a decision made by all members of Syrian society.

We are following with great concern the internal security situation in Syria. It is important to restore stability and security in Syria so that it does not become a safe haven or a transit country for terrorist groups.

We fully support Lebanon and its stability and sovereignty over all its territories. We call for redoubling efforts to rebuild what was destroyed by the Israeli war machine to ensure the country's development and stability.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until the afternoon of Friday, 24 January, at 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 6.05 p.m.*