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9963rd meeting

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dar	(Pakistan)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Denmark	Ms. Lassen
	France	Mr. Bonnafont
	Greece	Mr. Stamatekos
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Panama	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Totangi
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Somalia	Mr. Mohamed Yusuf
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Ms. Shea

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I would like to warmly welcome the distinguished ministers and other high-level representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

Before each member is a list of speakers who have requested to participate in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, as well as the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in this meeting.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations.

Mr. Khiari: I brief the Security Council today as intensive talks continue over a potential Gaza ceasefire agreement and release of hostages. It is crucial that this lead to a permanent end to the war and the release of all hostages. It is long past time for the fighting to end, for the hostages to return home, for adequate humanitarian aid to enter the Strip and for recovery and reconstruction to begin in the context of a return to a political path towards a two-State solution.

While talks are ongoing, the horrific situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, with Israeli military operations and hostilities expanding throughout the Strip and the human toll mounting by the hour. This nightmare of historic proportions must end immediately.

The intensive Israeli military operation in Deir Al-Balah, which has resulted in still further Palestinian displacement and direct strikes on two United Nations guest houses, has further exacerbated the dire situation and impeded humanitarian operations. At least 1,891 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since my last briefing on 30 June (see S/PV.9950), according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Some 294 were reportedly killed while attempting to collect aid, including in the vicinity of militarized aid distribution sites. Israeli forces have continued to issue evacuation orders, causing the repeated displacement of the population. Food insecurity and the broader humanitarian situation have continued to worsen despite the limited increase in the approval of entry of humanitarian supplies.

According to Israeli sources, 50 hostages, including one woman, are still being held captive by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza, including 28 who are believed to be dead. Since 30 June, 13 Israel Defense Forces soldiers have been killed in hostilities in Gaza. Palestinian militants have also continued to sporadically and indiscriminately launch rockets towards Israel.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly condemned the continued holding of hostages by Hamas and other armed groups. The hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. I echo the Secretary-General's call for the repeated displacement of the population in Gaza to cease. Any forced displacement of the population from any part of the occupied Palestinian territory would constitute a breach of international law obligations. International humanitarian law must be respected by all parties at all times, and civilians must be protected.

On 17 July, the Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gaza City was hit by an Israeli strike, which killed three and injured several others. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem condemned what it said was a targeted strike on the church and said that the extensive damage had forced the evacuation of some 600 Palestinians seeking shelter in the compound, including children and those with special needs. The Secretary-General condemned the strike, stressing that attacks on places of worship are unacceptable. The incident also prompted widespread condemnation and calls for accountability from Member States. The Israeli Prime Minister's Office said that Israel deeply regrets that a stray ammunition hit the church and noted that Israel is investigating the incident.

On 10 July, European Union (EU) High Representative Kallas announced that the EU and Israel had agreed on significant steps to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Since then, Ms. Kallas has reiterated the need to implement the agreement and that far more assistance is needed.

Since 9 July, following 130 days of a full blockade on fuel, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of a small number of fuel trucks through the Kerem Shalom/Karem Abu Salem crossing for medical facilities and other essential services. This amount is a fraction of what is required to run essential life-saving services in Gaza, where nearly every aspect of life depends on fuel.

The situation in the occupied West Bank also remains deeply concerning, with high levels of violence driven by ongoing Israeli military operations, many involving civilian casualties and extensive damage to homes and infrastructure, attacks by settlers against Palestinians and attacks by Palestinians against Israelis.

On 1 July, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian boy during an operation in Ramallah. He was reportedly shot from inside an armoured vehicle while walking with a relative.

On 10 July, two Palestinians shot and killed an Israeli man in the Gush Etzion settlement. The Palestinian perpetrators were reportedly shot and killed by Israeli civilians at the scene.

On 11 July, Israeli settlers attacked and killed two Palestinians, one of them a visiting American citizen, near the village of Sinjil. One of them reportedly bled to death after being shot and the other was beaten with bats and sticks. On 16 July, United States Ambassador to Israel Huckabee condemned the attack as a terrorist act and said Israel must ensure accountability.

Settlement advancement also continues, as numerous ministers and members of the Knesset intensified their calls on the Government to formally annex the West Bank or parts of it.

Further exacerbating the situation, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to face a dire fiscal crisis. The continued withholding of clearance revenues by Israel, amounting to \$2.7 billion, has had a severe impact on the PA's ability to meet its core obligations and sustain essential public services.

Since May, the PA has been unable to pay civil servant salaries, including those of the security forces, or provide social support. In an emergency session held on 17 July, the Palestinian Cabinet issued a stark warning that the PA may be forced to temporarily shut down vital sectors. Beyond the immediate risks to healthcare and basic service delivery, the Palestinian Authority also cautioned that similar disruptions across other institutions could erode social cohesion and undermine overall stability.

Unless urgently addressed, the deterioration of the PA's fiscal and institutional situation could have catastrophic consequences, undermining the significant progress made over many years to build up Palestinian institutions. It is essential

that the international community provide immediate support to address the PA's fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza.

In the midst of these multiple crises, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face immense operational, political and financial pressures. UNRWA's operations have been impeded in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Three hundred and thirty Agency staff have been killed in the war in Gaza. I reiterate the Secretary-General's message that UNRWA cannot be replaced, and I cannot overstate enough how serious the Agency's financial crisis is. Based on current forecasts, there is not enough money to sustain all operations in all fields beyond August 2025.

We remain concerned by the precarious situation in the region, marked by sporadic developments and recurrent volatility.

The situation along the Blue Line remains stable but fragile. The Israel Defense Forces maintain a presence north of the Blue Line, while unauthorized weapons belonging to non-State actors are still being uncovered in southern Lebanon by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. In this context, the Lebanese authorities have reiterated their commitment to bringing all arms under the exclusive control of the State. I urge both Lebanon and Israel to honour their obligations under the cessation of hostilities agreement and to take concrete steps towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), restoring and sustaining stability in the area.

Syria is contending with another episode of violence that puts at risk its path to a peaceful, credible, orderly and inclusive political transition. Fighting in Suwayda has resulted in hundreds of casualties, including Druze and Bedouin civilians. I reiterate the Secretary-General's unequivocal condemnation of all violence against civilians, including all acts that fan the flames of sectarian tensions and rob the people of Syria of their opportunity for peace and reconciliation after 14 years of brutal conflict.

Against this backdrop, citing the violations against the Druze community and pledging to protect them, between 12 and 16 July, Israel resumed and intensified its air strikes on Syrian territory. It is essential that both Israel and Syria uphold the terms of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces to preserve the ceasefire between both parties and refrain from any action that would further undermine it and the stability of the Golan region.

Repeated and increasingly desperate appeals for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza have been made in the Council. Today, the situation inside the Strip — especially for women and children — is more dire than at any time in this crisis.

I implore the parties first and foremost to end this war, release all hostages and allow the Palestinian population in Gaza to receive the humanitarian assistance they so desperately need. I urge all Member States, including those in the Council, to take all possible steps to bring about this end.

Urgent steps are needed to reverse the deeply concerning trajectory we see across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Addressing the high levels of violence, including stopping the escalating settler attacks, in the occupied West Bank, alongside fiscal relief for the Palestinian Authority, are key priorities.

There will be no lasting solution to this crisis without a political horizon to resolve the conflict and an end to the occupation. The upcoming ministerial meeting to support a two-State solution, co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, is key to highlight international consensus around these goals and reaffirm the principles sustaining the two-State solution. It is also a crucial moment to express support for the Palestinian Authority, identify ways to strengthen it and encourage further

reforms in line with its commitments, and to demonstrate, through tangible steps, our unwavering commitment to the two-State solution.

Our goal is clear — realizing the vision of two States, Israel and a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

The President: I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We thank Pakistan for elevating this open debate to a ministerial level, and in this connection we welcome Your Excellency, Mr. President, presiding over this very important meeting. I also would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Khaled Khiari, for his briefing.

Four-year-old Razaan fought for as long as she could but her body gave up and she died of malnutrition on Sunday. Yesterday, 6-year-old Yousuf died of starvation. He was among 15 people to starve to death in the last 24 hours in Gaza.

Israel has ravaged Gaza. It has destroyed nearly everything in that narrow strip of Palestinian land. But nearly 2 million human beings remain, including 1 million children. They must be saved. Israel has destroyed everything — their lives, their homes, the mosques and the churches, the schools and the hospitals, the entire infrastructure of life and even the cemeteries. But make no mistake, the real target is the 2 million Palestinians who remain in Gaza. For Israel, their destruction is a requirement for its scheme to take over the land. The fact that Netanyahu and his Government are actively pursuing the transformation of Gaza into a land without a people through genocide and ethnic cleansing under the unconvincing disguise of voluntary migration has only been made possible by the impunity they enjoy. All of what is happening now was predictable, premeditated and planned. It is a criminal and cruel enterprise occurring openly for all to see. Do members know when the first plan for so-called voluntary migration was presented to the Israeli cabinet? It was on 13 October 2023. Go back to what we said in this very Chamber 20 months ago (see S/PV.9484). We said that this would happen. It took tens of thousands of Palestinians being killed for the world to acknowledge it. How many more must die before the world acts to stop this genocide?

In Gaza, starved journalists are reporting about starving health and humanitarian personnel trying to save the lives of starving infants and children and their starving families. People are dying of hunger and thirst by design or while desperately trying to get food or water — again, by design. People are collapsing in the streets while yet again being forcibly displaced — again, by design. People are being gunned down and murdered by Israeli soldiers for merely trying to get a bag of flour or lentils to feed their families — again, by design. Every day now, we receive heart-wrenching messages from Gaza with a few words: I am hungry. That is what our children are saying and what every individual in Gaza is saying. They are also saying: there is no food for my family, we are dying, help us.

What should we tell them? What should the Security Council tell them? Should we tell them that the whole world is against this starvation policy and yet it is worsening, or that no one wants to see people in Gaza starving and yet the world watches on as they die of hunger and thirst? Should we read to them the strong statements issued, or the resolutions adopted? What should we tell them? They hear of the outrage, condemnation, pressure and deals being made but find no food to save their lives or those of their loved ones or get shot to death while trying to reach it. They bury their sons and daughters every day. They grow thinner as their bodies eat away at them every day, wasting away, their struggle to survive more painful and more crushing every day.

What should we tell them? Should we tell them that the negotiations for a ceasefire continue and that, in the meantime, Israel has been given a right to massacre them and deny them aid for survival? Is that what international law stipulates? Is that what humanity dictates?

What should we tell them? Should we tell them that this is the extent of what the world can do — or is willing to do — to save Palestinian lives? Should we tell them that the fact that the perpetrators of these horrors are Israelis means that they cannot be held to account or that there is aid at the borders and brave United Nations and humanitarian personnel ready to distribute that aid as they have done before, but we cannot get Israel to open the crossings and allow the aid to be distributed without killing those distributing it or those receiving it?

What is our collective plan to actually save lives? What is being done now that could actually stop this horror? That is the only measure that matters. Are we doing what is necessary to save the millions of lives at risk? Are we upholding our legal, political, humanitarian, moral and human obligations? The answer is blatantly clear: we are not. So, which one is it? Are Palestinian lives not worth saving, or does Israeli supremacy extend as far as conferring on Israel a right of life and death over the Palestinian people as a whole?

It is now for every State to determine where it stands at this historical juncture. All countries will be asked what they did during this genocide — not what they said or considered doing, but what they actually did. What did they do to stop it and the destruction of human life? There is no time to waste and no place for self-inflicted powerlessness. Countries have tools that they must use, nationally and collectively, to bring the genocide to an end. Members must ask themselves: have we done everything possible? I assure them that it is impossible to say yes. We call for a coalition of the willing to take every action necessary now to end the genocide, uphold international law, save what is left of our humanity under the rubble in Gaza and end the occupation and conflict.

A year ago, the International Court of Justice issued a landmark opinion on ending the unlawful presence of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory (see A/78/968), which spelled out in no uncertain terms the obligations of Israel and — as importantly — the obligations of third parties. All States claiming to be law-abiding States must take action to comply with that opinion and ensure that they move away from complicity and contribute to accountability. More than a month ago, the General Assembly called on all Member States to individually and collectively advance accountability and take all measures necessary, in line with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, to ensure compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with its obligations (General Assembly resolution ES-10/27). Since the adoption of that resolution, more than 3,000 Palestinians have been killed, the majority women and children. States must act now to stop these atrocities.

I represented the State of Palestine at the meeting of The Hague Group in Bogotá, where countries came together and adopted concrete measures to halt the genocide and advance accountability. This is an important step in the right direction.

Several of the countries represented here have also announced concrete steps and initiatives to the same effect. But much more needs to be done, and fast. The commitment made by some is good, but it is not sufficient. We need more, from all Council members, within days, not weeks, and certainly not months. We are out of time because every day we fail to act, children are killed, starved, orphaned, burned, disabled and traumatized. Families are shattered. Life is destroyed.

Red lines are useless if they can be crossed over and over again without consequences. Rules are worthless if we are not willing to sanction those that breach

them. Words are meaningless if they are not followed by action. We need Council members to act and act now.

Of course, it is better to speak out rather than stay silent. But speaking out cannot be an alternative to action, especially when it is evident Israel is not listening and becoming only more brutal and only more dangerous.

We should not pretend we are not hearing what Israel is saying or not seeing what it is doing. Netanyahu, Katz, Saar, Smotrich and Ben-Gvir are clear. They say there are no innocent people in Gaza. They call our children children of darkness. They call our people human animals and have been acting accordingly. They spoke of inflicting death and destruction on all of Gaza and they did so. They are confessing to their own crimes and are committing them in plain sight for all to see. Seven decades of impunity make them confident they have no reason to hide their intentions or actions.

We warn against all those who try to portray this conflict as a religious conflict, including those who do so to shield Israel from criticism and condemnation. This is not a conflict between Jews and Muslims. It is a war against a Palestinian presence in the land of Palestine. Palestinian Christians are not spared from Gaza to Taibeh, from Bethlehem to Jerusalem.

The Israeli strike against the Holy Family Church is not the first of its kind. By the way, this is the church that the late Pope Francis used to call every day. The historic Greek Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrios in Gaza was bombed in the early days of the war, as was the great Omari Mosque. Two Palestinian women were shot and killed on the grounds of the Holy Family Church back in December 2020.

Settlers' terror attacks are about forcibly displacing Palestinian communities, regardless of their faith, and about stealing their land. Christians are harassed, attacked and beaten like their Muslim brothers and sisters. When trying to celebrate their holy days, priests and nuns report attacks against them and church properties. They are spat on, insulted and threatened by Israeli extremists. This is not a conflict between Jews and Muslims.

The diversity of our people reflects the diversity of this land and its rich history and its significance for all monotheistic religions, and the solidarity movement with Palestine is comprised of people of all nationalities and all faiths, coming together against injustice, against occupation and apartheid, against oppression and genocide. It includes Israelis who care about justice but also about Israel and its future, and they know that the path on which Israel has embarked, by which it thinks it can impose its will on the region through bullets and bombs and expects surrender rather than peace, is reckless and wrong and will lead to devastating effects for the region and the world.

Mark my words, Israel's genocide in Gaza will redefine the region and our world for generations to come, and what we do next will determine how it does that.

An alternative path is possible, if we act now, in which life is restored in Gaza, in which freedom for the Palestinian people is achieved, in which Palestinians and Israelis can live in shared space and security and in which the region as a whole can experience peace, stability and prosperity. This path of a just and lasting peace, upholding international law, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — including self-determination and the realization of their right to their independent State, and the implementation of the two-State solution with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security — is the only path forward. It requires the mobilization of all States to advance freedom and justice leading to peace and security. The international conference to be convened by Saudi Arabia and France at the end of this month offers a unique opportunity to transform international law and international consensus into

an achievable plan and to demonstrate resolve to end the occupation and conflict, once and for all, to the benefit of all peoples and of all the States of the region. That is the path that must be taken, with courage and commitment and without delay.

It all starts with Gaza, with the children of Gaza. For now, history will remember us all for the lives we failed to save. But many more lives remain to be saved. Let us not fail them.

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

Mr. Danon (Israel): I believe this Chamber and the United Nations would benefit from something basic — a full and honest overview of the current state of our region.

Let us begin in Gaza, where Hamas continues with its depraved tactics. Fifty innocent people remain held hostage. Israel has been working tirelessly to bring them home. We have made compromise after compromise, crossing lines no other nation would consider, but Hamas has rejected each and every offer. Even as we speak, we receive rejections from Hamas.

For Hamas, the suffering of its own people is its greatest weapon. The longer the misery continues, the longer they can feed it into their propaganda machine. I am sure that all members will address the humanitarian situation today, but I remind them that they must all focus their pressure where it belongs — on Hamas. It is saying no to the offer. If members do not believe me, they can ask the United States, Qatar and Egypt — the ones trying to negotiate. Hamas is rejecting every offer.

In Lebanon, the new Government has made promising statements about reform, and we are listening, but Hizbullah is busy attempting to rearm and reassert itself in southern Lebanon and Beirut. We have seen this movie before, and we know how it ends. Israel will never allow this to happen. We will not allow Hizbullah to rebuild its terror infrastructure on our northern border.

In Iran, the genocidal regime that spent 12 days launching missiles at Israeli civilians is trying to restart its nuclear programme. Since we have the so-called privilege of the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Gharibabadi, being here today, let me ask him directly: what is his plan now? Will he continue with his murderous agenda? Will he keep running towards a nuclear bomb? Will he keep expanding his ballistic missiles for attacks on civilians? Will he keep pumping money into his terrorist proxies? He does not need to answer, because we already know. Now is the time for action. Sanctions must not be lifted; they must be imposed now on the regime's economy, its terror network, its ballistic missile programme and the individual leaders who sit in Tehran and plot murder as their foreign policy.

In Syria, jihadist forces have travelled south of Damascus to the Druze city of Suwayda, where they have committed unimaginable atrocities. Hundreds of innocent men, women and children now lie dead. I have personally received hundreds of calls from my Druze friends in Israel, terrified and horrified by what is happening to their people, their family ties across the border, their brothers and sisters living both in Suwayda and in Israel. For us, this is personal. It is Israel's sacred moral duty to stand by our Druze brothers and sisters in their time of need. We are guided by our unshakeable moral compass. We will not stand idly by while innocent minorities are slaughtered just kilometres away from their Israeli family members.

So, yes, the Middle East today is embroiled in chaos, but it is also filled with opportunity. There is chaos for the innocent hostages still trapped in Hamas' tunnels, chaos for the civilians and minorities in Lebanon and Syria still facing terror and chaos for the entire region as Iran continues to push the world to the edge. But there is also opportunity, because the forces of darkness have been weakened — Hamas has lost much of its terror infrastructure and its senior leadership, Hizbullah was crippled by Israel's operations last year and Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile

programmes have been set back in a way once thought impossible. Israel is making the Middle East safer for everyone who values peace and calm.

In other words, we are doing the work of the United Nations. While Israel dismantles terror networks and protects innocent lives, what does the United Nations do? It clings to its political agenda, it protects its bias, it defends the agencies that have long abandoned neutrality. One does not need to look far to see this bias in action. Just look at the statements and conduct of Tom Fletcher and his agency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Too often, Mr. Fletcher has forgotten or decided to ignore the fact that his statements have consequences. He has repeatedly abandoned his sacred responsibility to act without bias, choosing instead to fuel a political campaign against Israel. Several weeks ago, Mr. Fletcher claimed that 14,000 babies in Gaza would starve to death within 48 hours. That statement was false and baseless. While he quietly walked it back, the damage had already been done. However, with another lie, Mr. Fletcher has not walked back the accusation that Israel is committing genocide. He knows that that is not true. There are facts, international law and intention must be proven, yet he said it anyway. That word carries more weight than any other accusation; to use it falsely is to dishonour the memory of real genocide victims and endanger more lives by fuelling hatred. It is not too late to correct the record. Israel demands that Mr. Fletcher retract his statement publicly, unequivocally and immediately.

But this is no longer just about one official's reckless remarks. Irresponsibility has infected OCHA from top to bottom. Let us start with the data. On 6 May, OCHA published figures claiming to show official civilian casualties in Gaza. Just two days later, those figures were reduced by more than 10,000 — not by one, not by 10, not by 100 and not by 1,000, but by 10,000, just like that, with no explanation or accountability, just a quiet adjustment of 10,000 less, as if the original numbers were not already plastered across headlines worldwide. OCHA has built its reports almost exclusively on data from Hamas-run institutions. There is no independent verification, no cross-checking and no effort to distinguish between civilians and terrorists. Every casualty is listed as a civilian. That violates the United Nations own standards in every other conflict, but when it comes to Israel, those standards disappear.

At the same time, OCHA has actively undermined Israel's humanitarian efforts in Gaza. It tracks only United Nations-coordinated aid, while ignoring the thousands of trucks of food, medical supplies and fuel that Israel, the private sector and other partners have delivered. OCHA has undercounted the number of trucks by more than 13,000. That is a deliberate choice to misrepresent reality. Perhaps most disturbing, Israel has uncovered clear evidence of Hamas affiliation within OCHA's ranks. So, when we combine all of that with Mr. Fletcher's repeated falsehoods, we are not looking at a humanitarian agency, we are looking at a propaganda machine. I have said many times before: Israel believes in humanitarian work, and we are committed to helping civilians, protecting innocents and ensuring that aid reaches those who need it, but we will not work with organizations that have chosen politics over principles. Mr. Fletcher has made it clear that OCHA is no longer a neutral agency.

Israel is therefore left with no choice but to act. Today I announce that Israel will take steps to ensure that what has been happening with OCHA will no longer continue. Hundreds of OCHA employees are undergoing security vetting. Key employees will not have their permits renewed following clear evidence of strong affiliation with Hamas. Some were even involved in the atrocities of 7 October 2023. Israel will no longer grant automatic visas to OCHA's international staff. Visas will now be limited to one-month terms. What was will no longer be. Jonathan Whittall, OCHA's Head of Office for the so-called territories, has consistently and outrageously demonstrated his bias and agenda against the State of Israel. He will not have his visa renewed, and he will leave the country by 29 July.

At some point, enough is enough — enough of the hypocrisy, enough of the bias, enough of the endless defamation campaign against the State of Israel. Israel is doing the job that the United Nations was created to do. We are dismantling terror networks; we are protecting civilians; we are standing up for minorities under threat. While Israel fulfils that mission, many within the United Nations spend all of their energy, 24/7, trying to smear Israel, protecting their own biases, siding with the very actors who fuel the chaos.

It is time to return to the core purpose of the United Nations. Israel will continue to do what is necessary to protect our people, defend our borders, help our neighbours in need and bring our hostages home. We invite the United Nations to finally do the same.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

I am honoured to preside over this important open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his comprehensive briefing.

For decades, the Palestinian people have endured the worst form of occupation and apartheid. They have been denied their fundamental and inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood. What we have witnessed in Gaza for the past 22 months is not just a humanitarian catastrophe but a collapse of humanity itself. Gaza has become a graveyard for innocent lives and international law, in particular international humanitarian law. More than 58,000 Palestinians — most of them women and children — have been killed in Israel's brutal military assault. The systematic targeting of hospitals, schools, United Nations facilities, aid convoys and refugee camps is not incidental. It amounts to deliberate acts of collective punishment, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the binding provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice.

The hunger crisis in Gaza has reached unprecedented and deeply alarming levels. According to the World Food Programme, one third of the population has not been eating for multiple days in a row — an indicator of catastrophic levels of food insecurity. The Palestinian question is a litmus test for the credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council, as well as for the integrity of international law. Failure to uphold the rights of the Palestinian people will embolden impunity and undermine the legitimacy of the very international order that we all claim to defend and uphold. The Security Council must live up to its responsibility and ensure compliance with its own decisions.

Pakistan reaffirms its unwavering and principled support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people and their right to a viable, sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That is the only just and durable solution — enshrined in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the consensus position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). We urge the Security Council to pursue the following concrete measures with unity and urgency.

First, there must be an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and across the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as the full implementation of resolution 2735 (2024). We appreciate the ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at securing a ceasefire in Gaza and hope that they will yield tangible and meaningful outcomes, including a permanent end to the war. We appreciate the role played by Egypt, Qatar and the United States in that regard.

Secondly, there is a need for unfettered, sustained and secure humanitarian access to all civilians in need and for the protection of aid workers, medical teams

and United Nations personnel. Immediate steps should be taken to ensure the delivery of life-saving food and medical assistance, restore humanitarian supply lines and prevent famine conditions from taking hold.

Thirdly, there is a need for renewed and reinforced international support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which remains indispensable to the survival of millions of Palestinians.

Fourthly, an end must be brought to the forced displacement, the illegal expansion of settlements and the annexation of Palestinian land, in particular in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Fifthly, it is necessary to implement the Arab and OIC-led reconstruction plan for Gaza, which represents a vital framework for post-conflict recovery and rehabilitation, sustainable development and the restoration of the dignity of the Palestinian people.

Sixthly and lastly, a political horizon is the need of the hour, namely, the revival of a genuine and time-bound political process to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting two-State solution in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Pakistan welcomes the growing international momentum in support of Palestinian statehood and full membership within the United Nations. We urge those that have yet to recognize the State of Palestine to do so as soon as they can. We also welcome the convening of the international conference on the two-State solution on 28 July, co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and France, to help to generate renewed momentum and take concrete actions towards achieving the two-State solution.

A comprehensive and enduring peace in the Middle East requires addressing all interrelated crises across the region through effective multilateralism and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Pakistan supports the stabilization of Syria through an inclusive political process. Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity must be upheld. Israel must withdraw immediately from the separation zone established under the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights in accordance with the resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). In Lebanon, the ceasefire understanding and resolution 1701 (2006) must be respected, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon safeguarded. We must support the peace process in Yemen, facilitated by the United Nations and regional actors, in particular Saudi Arabia and Oman. The sharp rise in tensions and violence as a result of Israel's aggression and unlawful military strikes in Iran was profoundly disturbing. Those attacks set a dangerous precedent and pose a grave threat to regional and global peace.

Pakistan calls for urgent recourse to dialogue and diplomacy, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, in order to find a peaceful and lasting solution to this issue, in accordance with the rights, obligations and responsibilities of all parties. History has taught us that the use of force and unilateral military action only deepen conflicts and entrench divisions, with tragic human and humanitarian consequences. The way forward lies in upholding international law, ending foreign occupation, rejecting the use of force and promoting solutions through dialogue and diplomacy. It is time to give the Palestinian people what they have been denied for too long: justice, freedom, dignity and a State of their own. That is the path to durable peace and stability in the Middle East.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Stamatekos (Greece): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his detailed and insightful briefing.

A great deal has transpired in the volatile region of the Middle East since our most recent open debate in April (S/PV.9907), demonstrating the potential pitfalls in a part of the world where security can unravel in an instant. The recent cessation of hostilities between Iran and Israel was a welcome development. It is now critical for International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to resume their activity of verifying the status of Iran's enriched uranium stockpiles and enrichment capabilities. We urge Tehran to abide by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, return to the negotiation table and uphold its commitments as part of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Volatility in the Red Sea region, a nodal maritime route, exposes the international community to acute security risks and economic uncertainty, jeopardizing global trade and supply chains. Underscoring the importance of immediately ceasing all attacks against merchant ships, we reiterate our call for full respect for, and implementation by all of, the United Nations arms embargo against the Houthis.

The core of regional tensions and turbulence lies where it all started: on 7 October 2023, with the horrendous terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel. As discussed a week ago — yet again — in the Chamber (see S/PV.9959), a year and a half into this conflict, a severe humanitarian crisis has taken hold of the entire Gaza Strip, with the population facing conditions of distress and struggling to survive. We welcome the recent agreement between Israel and the European Union on scaling up humanitarian aid for the people in Gaza, as it provides some much-needed hope. The agreement demonstrates that dialogue with Israel can yield results. On this premise, we urge Israel to allow and facilitate the safe, unconditional, massive and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid into the Strip. We expect the agreed steps to be implemented with a sense of urgency. Allowing substantially increased amounts of humanitarian aid to enter the Strip and opening the southern and northern crossing points are imperative. The expertise of the United Nations, its agency network and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East undoubtedly remains invaluable in order to achieve that.

At the same time, we stress that any humanitarian plan must adhere to the core principles of international humanitarian law, cover all of Gaza and support the existing humanitarian operations within the Strip. Israel's Gaza Humanitarian Foundation plan falls short of that promise.

As efforts led by Egypt, Qatar and the United States to secure a much-needed ceasefire deal are ongoing, let us recall that hostages continue to suffer, held in captivity by Hamas for 19 consecutive months. Having repeatedly condemned the 7 October terrorist attacks and the ongoing detention and inhumane treatment of hostages, we reiterate our demand for their immediate and unconditional release. We deplore the refusal of Hamas to hand them over.

While conditions in Gaza remain dire, the security situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem also raises concerns. We condemn the escalation, the continued settler violence, the expansion of illegal settlements and Israel's military operations. Settlement expansion is contrary to international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, seriously undermining the prospects of a two-State solution. The repeated attacks on Taybah, one of the Christian-majority villages in the West Bank, are particularly alarming. In the same vein, we express our deep sorrow for the tragic loss and casualties caused by the attack on the Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gaza. Places of worship and religious sites should never be targeted.

There is no military solution for Gaza. Greece, along with the United Kingdom and 27 international partners, recently came together with a simple yet urgent message: the war in Gaza must end now. The only solution for Gaza is a political one. We therefore look forward to the upcoming High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of

the Two-State Solution, under the co-chairpersonship of France and Saudi Arabia, in the hope that it will bring new impetus to the political process. In this spirit, Greece is ready to engage to bring the Arab plan — as presented by Egypt — forward, developing it further where necessary. The plan constitutes a constructive proposal for the day after, on which an empowered and reformed Palestinian Authority would be able to exert effective governance in Gaza and the West Bank, without any government or security role for Hamas — and definitely without any forced displacement of Palestinians. All sides must now harness the necessary political courage to agree to a ceasefire, end the war and pave the way for a political process resulting in two States living side by side in peace and security.

Turning to Syria, ahead of our monthly briefing next week, we echo the Secretary-General's deep concern about the continued violence in the Druze-majority area of Suwayda', resulting in hundreds of casualties, including civilians, with reports of summary executions as well. We condemn all acts of sectarian violence, echoing the Secretary-General's plea to the interim authorities and local leaders to de-escalate. We also echo the call on the interim authorities to transparently and openly investigate the incidents, holding all those responsible to account.

Finally, yet importantly, Lebanon seems to be staying the right course, albeit not without significant challenges. Aware of the importance of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in preserving the cessation of hostilities — and, consequently, in the maintenance of regional peace and security — Greece fully supports the renewal of the mission's mandate. All parties need to fully abide by resolution 1701 (2006) and the provisions of the November ceasefire understanding, contributing to the security of both Israel and Lebanon. Reaffirming our commitment to the preservation of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, we consider it imperative to support the country's efforts to turn the page and the Lebanese Government's efforts to extend its authority over the entire territory of Lebanon, while also implementing much-needed reforms. We commend the progress made by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) on their redeployment and on bringing all weapons under State control. That progress is indicative of the Lebanese leadership's resolve in meeting its international obligations. Greece is steadfast in its commitment to supporting Lebanese institutions, including the LAF.

From Gaza and Syria to Lebanon and the Red Sea, the Middle East is being transformed before our very eyes. Greece will continue to support the role of the United Nations and the Council in monitoring the transformation of this volatile region, adding its voice in support of regional and international peace and security.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome your presidency, Sir, over the Security Council's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and we thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his comprehensive briefing.

Today in the Chamber, we are once again hearing extremely alarming assessments of the tragic developments in the Middle East, both in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and in the broader regional context. At the same time, the root cause of virtually all Middle East crises and contradictions, which create unprecedented security challenges for many States in the region, is the fact that the Palestinian problem remains unresolved, whereas the main parameters for the settlement of that problem were agreed upon by the international community many decades ago. As a result, a growing number of Middle Eastern countries are beginning to forget what it is like to live in peace without the risk of bombings, explosions and the threat of full-scale hostilities.

Unfortunately, in the time since our previous debate (see S/PV.9959), the escalation in the region has spiralled further, engulfing new States. In June, we all witnessed another sharp military confrontation, between Iran and Israel, which was

accompanied by strikes by West Jerusalem against Iranian nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, with Washington's support. These unjustified attacks are not only a gross violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations but also significantly undermine the foundations of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We strongly and unconditionally condemn the attacks against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Through this act of aggression, Washington and West Jerusalem pushed the region to the brink of a major war, which could have had dire radiological consequences, not only for the people of Iran but for all the States of the Middle East.

Despite the ceasefire between Iran and Israel announced by Donald Trump's Administration, the situation remains fragile. As a matter of principle, we do not share the concept of peace through strength embraced by Washington. This is not the way to solve the region's long-standing problems, and new waves of violence only exacerbate the problems. In that regard, a political and diplomatic solution must be sought, both in the context of a settlement in the Middle East and, more broadly, regarding all conflicts in the region. Cowboy-style efforts to crush some players and intimidate others have only a short-term effect and cannot lay the groundwork for a long-term, sustainable balance of interests in the complex Middle East landscape.

West Jerusalem should finally understand that it is impossible to change geography and that Israel will have to coexist with all of its neighbours. To this end, there must be at least a minimum level of trust between Israel and its neighbours. This cannot occur as long as there is continued radical anti-Palestinian rhetoric and when the Palestinians are denied the right to have a State of their own.

However, unfortunately, we are currently seeing the exact opposite. We are extremely worried by the signals sent by the Israeli leadership when they announce their intent to resolve the issue of the occupied Palestinian territories, primarily in the Gaza Strip, in one fell swoop. This intent is based on provocative plans to fully annex Gaza, as well as on other equally provocative public measures. As recently as yesterday, there was a conference in the Knesset entitled "The Gaza Riviera — from vision to reality", during which Israel's Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, reported on discussions with the command of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) about the parameters for the gradual absorption of the enclave through the re-establishment of illegal Israeli settlements in Gaza. In other words, the intent is to recolonize and reoccupy Palestinian territory.

This is an outrageously cynical approach, which essentially dooms the Palestinians to either death or exile. The moral and political duty of the international community in this regard is to ensure that these plans never come to fruition. Even the way the issue is being framed, however hypothetical it may seem, is unconscionable — it implies that Palestinians are second-class people and not masters of their own fate.

Meanwhile, the IDF continues cleansing the enclave, ignoring both the number of victims of its military operation — nearly 60,000 Palestinians have already been killed — and the scale of destruction of civilian infrastructure. Every day, we receive reports of hundreds of new casualties among the residents of Gaza, including at aid distribution centres related to the notorious Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which weaponizes humanitarian assistance and uses it for the purposes of blackmail. Over the past 24 hours, 99 Palestinians have been killed, including 26 who died while lining up for rations. There are also indiscriminate strikes against religious sites. On 18 July there was an attack targeting the only Catholic church in Gaza, the Holy Family Church. According to the available information, this was a direct strike against the church by an Israeli tank, as a result of which parishioners and clergy were seriously wounded. We strongly condemn such actions.

Our most serious concern is that the people of Gaza have no opportunity to obtain adequate medical assistance. Almost all medical infrastructure in the enclave has

been destroyed and there is still a shortage of basic necessities, including medicines, medical instruments, fuel and even body bags. Every day, hospitals receive hundreds of patients, including children on the brink of death from starvation. According to figures available as of yesterday, 33 people, including 12 children, have died of starvation in Gaza over the past 48 hours. These figures, as we all know, unfortunately will only grow. Doctors and nurses are also suffering from malnutrition. As is the case for the other residents of Gaza, they do not have adequate food assistance because of the de facto blockade of the enclave.

We believe that all those present here are well aware of the assessments issued by international humanitarian organizations and specialized United Nations agencies. For a long time, they have been saying that what is happening in Gaza goes beyond the acceptable, even during a war. Back in November 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres stated that Gaza was becoming a massive graveyard for children. And recently, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Philippe Lazzarini, described the situation in the Strip as nothing less than hell on earth. Such assessments are shared by all humanitarians working in or visiting Gaza, without exception.

How is Israel reacting to all this? We heard the answer today, when the Permanent Representative of that country actually announced in this Chamber the intention to squeeze the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs out of the occupied territory and impose personal sanctions against its senior officials. Now, it remains to be seen whether Washington will meekly be covering for its ally, supporting new inhumane measures that run counter to what it declares to be essential in other instances, namely the need to protect human rights. How long will this shameful situation continue, which is not only humiliating the human dignity of the Palestinians but also undermining our faith in humanitarian ideals, humankind and the triumph of justice?

Against the backdrop of the disaster in Gaza, the situation in the West Bank is somewhat obscured. However, it gives us no less reason for concern in the light of ongoing military operations, economic suffocation, arbitrary arrests of Palestinians, expropriation of their property and demolition of their homes. All this is compounded by the unconstrained violence of settlers, who often act under the lenient eye of the Israeli military, as well as by record rates of settlement construction amid open declarations of intent to fully annex the West Bank. Everything is part of a single strategy aimed at eliminating any preconditions and opportunities for the Palestinians to have their own State and make it impossible for them to survive in the territory occupied by Israel. Can we really allow ourselves to turn a blind eye to that, letting Israel, through its policy of fait accompli, trample on the documents related to the two-State solution adopted by the international community?

Russia's approach to the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and to the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian settlement as a whole has been consistent and based on obvious truths. We have invariably advocated for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, the release of all hostages and forcibly detained persons and for the provision of safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. In addition, we call for the relaunching of the peace process on the basis of the two-State solution, which would ensure the implementation of the legitimate aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people. We should not lose track of our ultimate goal — the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel.

Attempts to put the Palestinian question on the back burner, including the issue of redressing historical injustices regarding the legitimate rights of Palestinians to self-determination and return, are one of the reasons for the recurring violence, not only in the occupied Palestinian territories but throughout the region, and for the

spread of extremism and terrorism. The only way to counter these highly dangerous trends is by consolidating the efforts of the entire international community on the basis of a universally recognized international legal framework for a solution, with the two-State formula as its foundation.

Overall, the web of problems in the Middle East and the region as a whole has become so entangled that the international community needs, at the very least, a meaningful and unblinkered discussion on how to overcome them. In this context, the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, scheduled for next week, seems extremely necessary and timely. We note the efforts made in that regard by the French and Saudi co-Chairs to organize this forum. We hope that the Conference will set out specific steps for Member States and the entire international community to take, including towards recognizing Palestine and protecting specialized humanitarian agencies, in particular UNRWA.

Ms. Lassen (Denmark): Let me also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his comprehensive briefing.

Since our previous open debate on the matter (see S/PV.9907), the Middle East has continued to grapple with escalating conflict, humanitarian suffering and tragic loss of life — from a devastating humanitarian situation in Gaza to the unprecedented military escalation between Israel and Iran in the light of Iran's accelerated nuclear trajectory, from the resumption of Houthi attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea to their continuous attacks against Israel and its subsequent responses, and most recently, the recent fighting in the Suwayda province of Syria and Israel's strikes on Syrian territory. We must do all we can to prevent further escalation and a wider regional war. For stability to be restored in the Middle East, all parties must exercise the utmost restraint and recommit to diplomacy. The situation is simply too fragile and too dangerous.

We are convening today less than one week before the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, which has the potential to advance concrete solutions for Israelis and Palestinians alike. It takes place against a backdrop of appalling levels of human suffering in Gaza, the continued agony of Israeli hostages and their families and a further deterioration in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We deplore the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, where the population has been squeezed into less than 14 per cent of the territory. Their reality is one of imminent death by hostilities, starvation or disease beneath a daily spectre of not knowing what to fear the most — dying from starvation or from seeking food. Most recently, civilians in northern Gaza were attacked while seeking aid from a coordinated World Food Programme convoy. We strongly condemn all attacks on civilians seeking to obtain humanitarian aid. That must stop.

Denmark's position is clear: civilians, including humanitarian and United Nations personnel, and civilian infrastructure must be protected in accordance with international law. We are deeply concerned about Israel's new evacuation orders, encompassing the United Nations compound in Gaza, and the recent attacks on a warehouse and facility sheltering World Health Organization staff. All United Nations premises are inviolable and must be protected. Humanitarian aid must flow freely, safely and at scale into Gaza in line with international humanitarian law. We have heard time and time again that the United Nations and its partners are ready to deliver. They must be allowed to do so, and the United Nations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has our full support. The vilification of United Nations organizations and the rejection of visas for senior United Nations staff are in no one's interest. And, until a two-State solution is realized, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

in the Near East continues to be uniquely mandated by the General Assembly to deliver essential State-like services to Palestinian refugees. Denmark continues to call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire and for the immediate, unconditional and dignified release of all hostages kept by Hamas. We reiterate that Hamas can never be allowed to play a role in the future of Gaza.

Developments in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are further jeopardizing the prospects of a two-State solution. They must not be ignored. Denmark condemns the continued acceleration of settlement construction and the intensification of settler attacks against Palestinians. Just last month, Israeli settlers injured as many as 100 Palestinians — the highest monthly figure since OCHA began documenting casualties in 2005. We reiterate that all Israeli settlements are a clear violation of international law and call on the Israeli authorities to cease all further expansions and hold settlers accountable for their crimes. In that regard, we strongly oppose Israel's decision to resume the long-stalled E1 settlement expansion plan, which would add more than 3,400 new units and essentially cut the West Bank in two. We reiterate that resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 2334 (2016), are not merely words on paper — they must be fully implemented.

In conclusion, as we look to next week's High-Level Conference, it is critical for the international community to come together to advance concrete measures for the implementation of a two-State solution. This remains the only viable path to sustainable peace in the Middle East and a future in which Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in peace and security. Meanwhile, we must continue to work for de-escalation and lasting peace in the wider region. Denmark looks forward to contributing constructively to those ends.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the presidency of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Dar, and I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

For some time now, the Middle East has been mired in turmoil, with conflicts and confrontations escalating. The Gaza conflict, having dragged on now for 21 months, has resulted in more than 58,000 deaths and an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Israel's continued military offensive, restrictions on humanitarian access and implementation of a militarized mechanism for aid distribution have repeatedly caused significant civilian casualties. We strongly condemn Israel's recent ground offensive in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, as well as its attacks on World Health Organization facilities and the searching, interrogation and even detention of its personnel.

Military means are not the right way to solve the problem, and more killing will not bring lasting peace. China urges Israel to immediately cease all military operations in Gaza, fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law, fully restore access to humanitarian supplies and support the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations in providing assistance. China firmly supports the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher. Countries with significant influence on the parties concerned should adopt a fair and responsible attitude and truly play an active and constructive role.

While the war in Gaza rages on, the situation in the West Bank is also very tense. So far this year, settlement expansion and settler violence have killed more than 600 Palestinians and injured more than 5,000. The international community has repeatedly reaffirmed that settlement activities violate international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions and must cease immediately. Israel must stop its attacks in the West Bank, effectively curb settler violence, conduct impartial investigations into all attacks and ensure accountability.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, peace and stability also face serious challenges. Israel's continued attacks on Syria and Lebanon and its illegal military presence have increased tensions. The sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Syria and Lebanon must be fully respected, and the relevant Security Council resolutions must be strictly observed. The Syrian interim authorities should promote an inclusive political process and effectively fulfil their obligations under international law, including counter-terrorism. The international community should help and support the Lebanese Government in its active governance. We call on the Houthis to stop targeting commercial ships and urge all relevant parties to exercise calm and restraint to safeguard the security of navigation in the Red Sea.

It has been proven that war cannot resolve the Iranian nuclear issue and that a political solution is the only way forward. All parties should ensure the effective implementation of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Iran and prevent the situation from escalating again. The relevant parties should resume dialogue and negotiations on an equal footing to address their legitimate concerns through consultation. Iran's commitment to refrain from developing nuclear weapons should be taken seriously, and its right as a State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to the peaceful use of nuclear energy should be fully respected. The relevant countries should abandon the practice of resorting to threats and pressure at every turn, as that only exacerbates tensions and confrontation and may undermine diplomatic efforts even further.

Without stability in the Middle East, lasting peace in the world will not be possible. The Middle East cannot remain under the shadow of conflict forever, nor can its people live indefinitely in the turmoil of war. The question of Palestine remains at the heart of the Middle East issue, and the implementation of the two-State solution is the only viable way of resolving that question. The international community must firmly reject unilateral actions that erode the foundation of the two-State solution and must resolutely oppose dangerous attempts to annex Gaza and the West Bank. We welcome the convening of the high-level meeting on the implementation of the two-State solution next week and look forward to it galvanizing strong momentum towards the implementation of that solution.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): Let me first thank Pakistan for convening this open debate and express our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his sobering briefing.

His words echo what every soul in the Chamber already knows, what the world sees and what history will not forget: the catastrophic suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank alike. What we are witnessing is not war; it is annihilation, not only of people, but of life itself. This is a plan — a cruel, deliberate plan — to erase a people, to uproot them from their homeland. But no matter how many bombs fall, no matter how deep the pain of the Palestinian people in Gaza is, Palestine is not leaving. Palestinians are not leaving. They are the olive tree — burned, broken, but never uprooted. The Israeli occupation might seem overwhelmingly powerful militarily, but is it eternal? Justice, however, long-delayed, always finds its way, and the day will come when this horrible occupation ends.

Humanity has been bleeding in Gaza for the past 600 days, but so too has the very idea of law, morality, justice and conscience. International law is being trampled. Famine is being openly used as a weapon. Just yesterday, 15 Palestinians died of hunger. The total is now 101, including 80 children. These children are dying not from wounds, but from the silence of empty plates. In Gaza, famine is spreading like fire through dry land. It touches everyone. It affects everyone — doctors, nurses, journalists, humanitarian workers and United Nations staff. It affects everyone — children, mothers and the elderly.

Yes, Gaza is starving, and the world — the international community — is merely contemplating. The Security Council is watching with inaction. The cause is clear. The solution is well-known. As the Médecins sans frontières Medical Coordinator in Gaza said plainly: “The starvation of people in Gaza is intentional. It could end tomorrow if the Israeli authorities allow food in at scale.” But instead, aid convoys are being blocked. Humanitarian centres are being attacked. And the so-called “Gaza Humanitarian Foundation”, or should I say, “Gaza Hunger Foundation”, has tragically become a death trap, endangering the very lives of the starving Palestinians whom it claims to be feeding. As one out of three Gazans has not eaten for days, aid is no longer a race for life; it has become a race to death, with more than 1,000 people killed and more than 6,500 injured — just for seeking help, just for seeking food, just for reaching out for bread. That is the blatant reality.

As of today, almost 60,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli occupying forces, while more than 143,000 have been injured. We will not forget them. Those who have committed those crimes should not and cannot lecture us on morality, respect for human dignity and respect for international humanitarian law. If they are keen to know about the reality in the enclave, they should allow journalists, human rights mandate holders and credible international non-governmental organizations free access to Gaza to investigate and report to the world on the real situation in Gaza. And today, humanitarian organizations are being attacked, not only in the enclave, but also in the Chamber. That is true of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Health Organization. No flag protects them anymore — no United Nations flag, no cross, no crescent and no dove. Why? They tell the truth about the horrible situation in Gaza. They are the witnesses to the genocide.

A ceasefire is long overdue. Yet, the Council remains bound by silence. We must not wait for permission to end the slaughter of dreams. Let us declare a ceasefire — an unconditional and permanent ceasefire — not as a gesture, but as a duty to what remains of our shared soul and our shared mandate in the Security Council. Let us shield the remnants of dignity from the dust of collapsing homes in Gaza and from the cries of children buried under the rubble.

This pattern is not limited to Gaza. In the West Bank, we are witnessing an alarming escalation. Israel has announced plans to further expand settlements, openly taking steps towards annexation. Settler terrorism has reached unprecedented levels. Palestinians are being pushed out of their lands and homes, their villages are being burned and their trees are being chopped down. Their lives and the lives of their families are being shattered. Even the sacred is not being spared. Settlers repeatedly assault Al-Aqsa Mosque and attack churches. The famous Ibrahimi mosque is now under threat. Algeria condemns these attacks and violations of international law in the strongest terms.

And while we speak of Palestine and reaffirm the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty over their land, while we advocate for the implementation of the two-State solution, the Knesset voted just today — not for peace, not for justice, but to claim what does not belong to it. It called occupation “sovereignty over the West Bank”. What will the international community — what will the Security Council — say this time? Will it make another statement or maintain another immoral silence?

Our answer to this barbarity must be to enforce respect for human rights and human dignity. Our answer to starvation must be to enforce the provision of life-saving aid. Our answer to injustice must be to enforce the supremacy of law. And our answer to the attempt to erase a nation — the Palestinian nation — must be the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Totangi (Sierra Leone): Sierra Leone thanks the presidency for convening this important and timely debate. The protracted crisis in the Middle East continues to demand the Council's urgent attention, principled clarity and resolute action.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his detailed briefing.

Across the region, fragility remains a defining feature. While recent de-escalations in Lebanon and between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the State of Israel offer some measure of relief, other theatres remain dangerously unstable. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the Syrian Arab Republic, in which the resurgence of violence has taken a devastating toll.

We reiterate our call for full respect and the implementation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement of Forces between Israel and Syria. All parties must uphold the ceasefire, exercise maximum restraint and refrain from actions that could further destabilize the region. In this regard, we recall the primary responsibility of the Syrian authorities to ensure the safety and protection of all civilians, including religious and ethnic minorities. This responsibility is not only a matter of national duty, but a legal obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law.

Turning to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, the scale and depth of human suffering in Gaza over the past months defy comprehension. The cruelty and violence endured by civilians are deeply distressing and should stir the conscience of the international community. Yet, despite repeated calls for restraint and adherence to international obligations, meaningful action by those with the power to stop the suffering remains regrettably insufficient.

Sierra Leone is particularly alarmed by three interrelated trends.

First, humanitarian access is being systematically obstructed. Humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies, have been impeded by access restrictions, targeted attacks and the militarization of aid delivery points. These developments have rendered many humanitarian corridors perilous, rather than protective, with the humanitarian architecture pushed to the brink of collapse. Essential life-saving assistance continues to be hindered by bureaucratic, political and operational constraints.

Secondly, cultural, religious and historical sites are being targeted and destroyed. Attacks on places of worship, cemeteries and culturally significant landmarks are not merely acts of war; they seek to erase the identity and heritage of an entire people. When coupled with the widespread destruction of homes, schools and civilian infrastructure, these actions signal an alarming pattern of displacement and dispossession.

Thirdly, people are being deprived of basic necessities. The use of siege tactics, repeated bombardment and forced evacuations, including the recent evacuation order covering approximately 5.6 square kilometres of Deir Al-Balah, which spans four neighbourhoods, are leaving the millions of Palestinians confined to ever-shrinking spaces, often without access to adequate food, clean water, or medical care. The use of starvation as a method of warfare is a grave breach of international humanitarian law.

Even more concerning is the report that the latest evacuation orders affect United Nations premises and warehouses, which are protected under international law. We are also deeply concerned that the staff residence of the World Health Organization was attacked three times in the past few days. We reiterate that the parties to the conflict must respect the inviolability of all United Nations staff, premises, warehouses and other civilian sites.

Taken together, these patterns point to a deeply troubling possibility — the risk of acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national,

ethnic, racial or religious group. As affirmed by the International Court of Justice in its provisional measures, the 1948 Genocide Convention obliges the international community to prevent such outcomes, once the risk becomes known.

To be clear, the invocation of atrocity prevention is not an attack on any State, religion, or people. It is, rather, a principled insistence on the rule of law, accountability and the protection of civilians. Criticism of military conduct or State policy must not be conflated with identity-based hate. Such conflation only serves to erode efforts towards peace, justice and reconciliation.

Sierra Leone unequivocally condemns the attacks of 7 October 2023 perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups. The deliberate targeting of civilians and the taking of hostages are unacceptable and constitute serious violations of international law. These crimes must be addressed through lawful and accountable means. However, we maintain that one atrocity cannot justify another. The principles of proportionality, distinction and necessity must be upheld at all times.

We also express grave concern regarding developments in the West Bank, in which increasing settler violence, forced evictions and demolitions further erode the prospects of peace and violate established norms under the Fourth Geneva Convention. These acts threaten to undermine not only the two-State solution but also the long-term stability of the region.

Accordingly, Sierra Leone calls for the following.

First, we call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and the West Bank, as a necessary step to halt further loss of life and enable the restoration of humanitarian operations.

Secondly, all hostages, both Israeli civilians unlawfully held by Hamas and Palestinian detainees held without due process, must be released.

Thirdly, there must be full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access. We welcome recent initiatives to expand aid delivery but stress that these measures must be scaled up, and the blockade lifted, and militarization abandoned.

Fourthly, there must be full compliance with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures, particularly those related to facilitating humanitarian aid and protecting civilians. The work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies on the ground must be preserved and strengthened.

Fifthly, any effort towards the permanent displacement of Palestinians must be rejected. Those forcibly removed must be allowed to return home when conditions allow. The right to self-determination must be respected and upheld.

Ultimately, there must be a credible return to the political track. A two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, remains the only viable and just path towards sustainable peace. In this context, we welcome the forthcoming High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution to be convened by France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and urge all relevant parties to engage constructively. We also commend the mediation efforts led by Egypt, Qatar and the United States of America, which have helped to facilitate temporary humanitarian pauses.

The Middle East stands at a critical crossroads. The suffering of civilians in Gaza, the instability in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen and the stagnation of the peace process collectively underscore the need for renewed leadership and firm action.

Mr. Bonnafont (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing. I followed very closely what was

said by the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

The priority in the Middle East is to obtain a permanent and immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages illegally held by Hamas and the massive and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. France continues to work tirelessly to this end and welcome the efforts of its partners in this regard. France firmly condemns the expansion of the Israeli offensive to the centre of Gaza, where evacuation orders have led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people in Deir Al-Balah and are hampering the work of many United Nations agencies, to which France reiterates its trust and support, starting with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, whose personnel are paying a disproportionate price for this tragedy.

This new operation is worsening the humanitarian situation at an accelerated pace, and the situation is marked by malnutrition and the risk of famine, the result of the blockade imposed by Israel. France condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli forces' firing on Palestinians in Gaza who are attempting to obtain humanitarian aid, which, according to the United Nations, has killed more than 1,000 people in the last two months. Any attempt to forcibly displace the population from Gaza, whether open or covert, would be illegal and unacceptable.

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, settlement activity must cease. It is a breach of international law. France staunchly opposes the resumption of the El settlement project. This project must not see the light of day. It is a violation of international law. It threatens the prospect of a two-State solution.

An alternative to war must be built in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to have a State and to enable Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security.

The gravity of the situation in the Middle East must not distract the Council from what is happening in Lebanon, in Syria and the Red Sea.

In Lebanon, despite the obstacles raised on both sides, we must continue our efforts to implement, in its entirety, resolution 1701 (2006), whose relevance is reinforced by the ceasefire agreement of 26 November 2024. The restoration of the Lebanese State's authority is at stake. It must regain its monopoly on the use of force across its territory. To achieve that goal, the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is essential to supporting the efforts of the Lebanese authorities and army in that regard.

In Syria, the ceasefire reached on Saturday thanks to the mediation efforts of the United States must be respected, humanitarian aid must be delivered unhindered to the Suwayda region and those civilians wishing to evacuate must be able to do so safely. France calls on Israel to refrain from any unilateral action that could destabilize Syria. The goal for the Council must be for Syria to make an inclusive transition, restore civil peace and revive the Syrian economy. The reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Syria must make it possible to support those objectives. That is also the aim of France's efforts to support the Syrian transitional authorities.

In Yemen and the Red Sea, as in the rest of the region, the Houthis must put a definitive end to their destabilizing actions in the Middle East. France calls for the resumption of the inter-Yemeni peace process under the aegis of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Hans Grundberg, to whom France reiterates its full support, in order to implement a political, security and economic road map.

A ceasefire agreement in Gaza could make it possible to write a new chapter in the Middle East, with the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

France is playing its full role in that regard. To that end, it will co-chair, alongside Saudi Arabia, the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution on 28 and 29 July. The Conference aims to bring the two-State solution to fruition using concrete measures. It also aims to revive a collective dynamic in favour of a political solution that meets Israel's legitimate security considerations and ultimately ensures the contiguity and viability of the Palestinian State. The Conference will focus on promoting the recognition of Palestine, normalization with Israel and regional integration, the reform of Palestinian governance and the disarmament of Hamas. We call on all Member States to ensure that they are represented there at a high level.

Mr. Alfaro de Alba (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank His Excellency Mr. Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, for convening this important meeting and for presiding over it. We also thank Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, for his briefing. We welcome the Ministers, high-level officials and representatives and thank them for their participation.

The Middle East remains the epicentre of a growing conflict, the scope of which only seems to be spreading. Panama is following with concern the serious ongoing situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where there have been multiple episodes of sectarian violence that threaten not only the internal stability of the country but also the security of the entire region. We condemn the recent escalation of violence against civilians, including religious communities and minorities in Syria, in particular the 22 June attack on the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Damascus, the sectarian clashes in Suwayda and the military operations in densely populated areas such as Dar'a and the capital Damascus. In that context, we reiterate the need to provide an opportunity for a political transition in Syria so that it can be truly inclusive and sovereign, in accordance with the principles set out in resolution 2254 (2015), with the constructive support of the international community, in particular the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, the humanitarian situation remains devastating. More than 80 per cent of the population in Gaza is displaced, living in extreme conditions and without adequate access to water, food, healthcare or basic services. The health system has collapsed, and thousands of children are facing acute malnutrition, which constitutes a humanitarian tragedy that demands urgent attention. Panama reiterates its urgent call for the establishment of an immediate ceasefire that will end the human suffering, facilitate the sustained, unrestricted and adequate entry of vital humanitarian aid to Gaza and ensure the immediate, dignified and unconditional release of all the hostages still being held by Hamas. Once again, we strongly condemn Hamas' acts.

Since May, hundreds of people have died trying to access humanitarian aid in Gaza, reflecting the desperation and the risks associated with alternative aid mechanisms to the United Nations system. We underscore that any efforts must be governed by the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, namely, humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is surprising and therefore deeply troubling that, owing to an apparent lack of political will or other reasons that are hard to understand, the aid that the people of Gaza desperately require has not yet been delivered effectively or in sufficient quantities. The aid must be delivered with the help of United Nations agencies, which have demonstrated that they have the necessary track record, experience and capacity to do so, and can involve the participation of other actors capable of complementing their work based on humanitarian principles.

In that regard, Panama reaffirms its support for United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in

the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and their personnel, whose humanitarian work has been fundamental even in the most adverse environments and who have paid a high price with their sacrifice. All international efforts should be aimed at complementing and strengthening, not replacing or excluding, existing multilateral mechanisms. There are also concerns about the deteriorating conditions in the West Bank, where restrictions are exacerbating the Palestinian population's suffering.

Growing regional instability has had repercussions in Lebanon, where clashes and cross-border attacks persist along the Blue Line despite the ceasefire reached in November 2024, leaving civilian casualties and more than 93,000 people displaced. The Lebanese Government and Armed Forces still face major operational constraints in exercising effective control in the southern part of the country, as set out in resolution 1701 (2006). Panama reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Lebanon, as well as its full support for the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose work is essential to preventing regional escalation. We urge all parties to guarantee UNIFIL's freedom of movement, strengthen tripartite coordination mechanisms and redouble their commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) as the basis for progress towards stability and lasting peace in Lebanon.

The recent escalation between Israel and Iran highlighted a high degree of regional interconnectedness, raising tensions significantly and causing deep concern at the international level. It also demonstrated the possible scope of a confrontation in the region, capable of generating a chain effect that not only affects the countries directly involved but also their allies and neighbours, with the potential to further complicate the geopolitical landscape. In that context, we note with particular attention and optimism the recent agreement on the cessation of hostilities between the two countries, which represents a crucial step, and we reiterate our call for diplomatic dialogue as the only legitimate and sustainable way to achieve peaceful and lasting solutions to the conflicts affecting the region.

Unfortunately, we have seen a resumption of the Houthis' illegal and unjustified attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea, threatening maritime security and freedom of navigation, endangering human lives, severely affecting global supply chains and hindering the delivery of essential humanitarian aid throughout the region. In Yemen, more than 5.2 million people are facing emergency levels of acute food insecurity, and 11.9 million are in a crisis situation, reflecting the immense humanitarian challenges confronting the region.

All of the foregoing shows that nothing in the Middle East takes place in a vacuum, which is why we must take immediate and coordinated action to support the entire region through a comprehensive approach that prioritizes both security and humanitarian aid. The people of the Middle East have frequently endured the consequences of conflicts, which have been consistently fuelled by external geopolitical dynamics, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence. As members of the Security Council, we have the moral and political duty to actively contribute to reversing that state of affairs. Our commitment must also be to the reconstruction of the region, not only of its infrastructure but also its social fabric. If there is one truth that we must acknowledge about the Middle East, it is that it is a region of profoundly resilient peoples, who deserve a different present and a better future, full of hope.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

My Foreign Secretary has been unequivocal: the war in Gaza must end now; Hamas and Israel must both commit to a ceasefire now. A ceasefire is within reach, and we urge all sides to make it a reality so as to secure the release of the hostages,

who have been cruelly held by Hamas since 7 October 2023, and to end the appalling suffering of Palestinian civilians. I will make three points.

First, the Israeli aid system is inhumane, ineffective, dangerous and fuelling instability. Reports and images this week of children dying from starvation are beyond horrific. The Israel Defense Forces are shooting at desperate Palestinian civilians on an almost daily basis. Hamas is exploiting that disorder. We call on Israel to end those attacks, to hold those responsible to account and to work with the United Nations to implement effective aid distribution, in line with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. Let me reaffirm the United Kingdom's firm and unequivocal support for the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in their brave efforts to get aid into Gaza. We also condemn recent strikes on the World Health Organization in Deir Al-Balah. Humanitarians and civilians must be protected.

Secondly, we condemn Defence Minister Katz's proposals for forced displacement to Rafah. Illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank continues at pace, as does settler violence, and even terrorism, against Palestinians. This is an accelerating campaign to prevent a Palestinian State. We condemn those attacks and call for Israel to hold its citizens to account. We also oppose the reintroduction of the E1 settlement plan, which is a flagrant breach of international law.

Thirdly, we are clear that Hamas must play no future role in the governance of Gaza, nor must it be able to threaten Israel's security again. However, the organization that represents a credible alternative to Hamas — the Palestinian Authority — is being undermined by Israeli actions. Israel is withholding \$2.6 billion in clearance revenues, crippling the Palestinian economy and pushing essential health and education services to the brink. That is not conducive to Israel's security.

The United Kingdom is resolute in its commitment to a two-State solution, and my Foreign Secretary has been clear that we are prepared to take further action to prevent the forcible erosion of the only viable path to lasting peace. Next week's conference, co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, is a vital opportunity to demonstrate the strength of international resolve to secure a better future for Israelis, Palestinians and the region.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): At the outset, Mr. President, my delegation thanks you, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for the important updates provided, particularly regarding the persistent and inhumane crisis being experienced by civilians in Gaza.

Guyana remains deeply concerned at the ongoing volatile security situation in the Middle East, which is being fuelled primarily by the violation of international law and the resort to forceful measures in response to perceived or real security threats. Should that trend continue, the insecurity and instability in the Middle East could destabilize the entire international system.

Guyana continues to follow developments in the occupied Palestinian territories, where that trend is most pronounced. In Gaza, the result, after 21 months of war, is a humanitarian crisis of immense scale. Briefings by the United Nations over this period have highlighted massive and multiple instances of displacement of civilians, widespread food insecurity, with the risk of famine extremely high and reports of even babies starving to death, and the inadequacy of the humanitarian response due to ongoing restrictions imposed by Israel. It is particularly striking that an average of 28 children are killed daily in Gaza, as reported by UNICEF. Nothing can justify this crisis, which has been deliberately created and foisted on Palestinian civilians. After witnessing the devastation in Gaza for almost two years, Guyana reiterates its

call on Israel to comply with its obligations under international law, including those governing occupation and the conduct of war.

Evidence has shown that misinformation has been used as a weapon in this war. We have seen that in the allegations against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East of it being involved in terrorist activities, resulting in funding cuts to the Agency last year and in the Israeli Government ultimately taking legislative action against it. That happened despite the lack of incontrovertible evidence to support the allegations.

We are witnessing the same strategy at work regarding the operations of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, despite the evidence that it is not operating in accordance with humanitarian principles and the deliberate and daily killing and injury of civilians at its sites. We are told that the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation is the best option for delivering aid to Palestinian civilians in need. The reports from the United Nations, however, tell a completely different story, which is also corroborated by reports from international non-governmental organizations and media sources privy to the situation in Gaza. It is important to counter all false narratives about what is happening in Gaza, as a critical step towards addressing the impunity that has characterized actions there, and to promote accountability. We continue to rely on the United Nations and its partners in Gaza to this end.

We continue to deplore the indiscriminate manner of Israel's strikes in Gaza, where it appears that virtually nothing is off-limits. Targets have included people sheltering in schools and tents; people seeking food, water, nutrition supplies or other assistance; medical and humanitarian relief personnel; and journalists. Following last week's strike on the Holy Family Church in Gaza, we took note of the explanation provided by the Israel Defense Forces, including its assertion that it directs its strikes solely at military targets. Guyana stresses that there should be no trivializing of the very serious consequences of Israel's war in Gaza, which has resulted in thousands of casualties. These consequences cannot be explained away. The road to accountability begins with fully acknowledging all violations of international law, including international humanitarian law.

It is urgent that the parties reach agreement on a ceasefire in Gaza. The civilian cost continues to be alarming. It is also urgent that all hostages being held captive in Gaza be released without conditions. In the same vein, Palestinians detained in Israel without charge must also be released. The safety of humanitarian personnel must be guaranteed if they are to take full advantage of the limited lifting of restrictions on humanitarian access into Gaza. Moreover, we call on Israel to cooperate with the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to ensure that they can deliver life-saving assistance to civilians.

Taking note of reports of plans to create a containment zone in Rafah, Guyana calls on Israel not to pursue any such plan, which would further restrict the movement of civilians in Gaza and confine them to an even smaller space. We call for an end to the ongoing displacement of Palestinians in Gaza. We also call for an end to the ongoing violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, including violence perpetrated by settlers.

Allow me to conclude by urging the Security Council to safeguard the rights of Palestinians. At the heart of this is enabling the exercise of their right to self-determination through the implementation of the two-State solution. Guyana remains fully supportive of this objective and hopes that the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, to be held next week, will advance this process.

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

The Middle East has a clear path to a better future. The Council must take concrete steps towards durable peace and prosperity. That starts with a future for the people in Gaza that is free of Hamas. The Council must meet the moment by pressuring Hamas to accept the ceasefire proposal already accepted by Israel, release the 50 remaining hostages held for more than 650 days, disarm and leave Gaza forever. Shielding Hamas from accountability undermines Israel's security, rewards terrorism and does nothing to improve the lives of Palestinians.

We remind the Council and the world that there are still two American citizens — Itay Chen and Omer Neutra — held by Hamas. We also underscore that Hamas has held Hadar Goldin since 2014. It is past time for Hamas to return all those it has taken hostage. Hamas bears sole responsibility for the massacre that it perpetrated on 7 October 2023. It is likewise responsible for the resumption of hostilities in March following Hamas' rejection of multiple ceasefire proposals.

The representative of Israel has addressed allegations of genocide made by some in this room. I am also compelled to speak on this. These accusations are politically motivated and categorically false. They are part of a deliberate, cynical propaganda campaign, as Hamas attempts to win symbolic victories to compensate for total defeat in war. The United States refutes those allegations entirely. America fully supports Israel's right to defend itself. Israel has taken numerous measures to limit harm to civilians and to address humanitarian needs. The loss of civilian life in Gaza is tragic, but the responsibility for this rests with Hamas, which could also stop the fighting today by agreeing to a ceasefire already accepted by Israel. I will also address allegations of Israel's plans to move Gazans to other countries. The United States does not support the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. President Trump has said that nobody is expelling any Palestinians from Gaza.

Hamas must accept the deal on the table. Anything short of that will only perpetuate the suffering of hostages in captivity, of their families, who are desperate to unite with loved ones and of Gazans, who deserve to live free of Hamas' tyranny.

With respect to the dire humanitarian situation, no one wants to see Palestinians in Gaza go hungry or thirsty. The United States supports getting assistance to civilians in Gaza. This should happen in a way that does not allow Hamas to benefit. We recognize the Israel Defense Forces' ongoing efforts to prevent civilian harm in Gaza. By contrast, Hamas' use of civilians as human shields is a deplorable violation of international humanitarian law. The United States stands for the protection of civilian lives during armed conflict, in compliance with international humanitarian law.

With respect to the deaths of Palestinians while seeking aid, the United States mourns the loss of all innocent lives, and we agree that more assistance needs to safely reach those in need. I would point out that the most recent tragedy occurred near United Nations convoys after they passed through the Zikim crossing. It is unfortunate that the United Nations continues to turn down the offers of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation to collaborate and coordinate aid efforts. The United States also offers condolences for those killed at the Holy Family Church in Gaza. We have asked Israel to investigate the strike and ensure that all civilians, including Christians, remain safe.

And with respect to the death of the American citizen in the West Bank, as Ambassador Huckabee has said, we have asked Israel to aggressively investigate the killing of Saif Musallet, an American citizen who was visiting family in Sinjil when he was beaten to death. There must be accountability for this criminal and terrorist act. Our condolences are with Saif's family. And we condemn criminal violence by

any party in the West Bank and support actions to ensure that all civilians, including Christian civilians, remain safe.

The future for the Palestinians must start in Gaza without Hamas. Hamas must disarm and leave Gaza, and the hostages must return home. Quiet diplomacy — not performative actions in New York or elsewhere — will achieve that goal.

Turning to Iran, we are likewise at a critical juncture. On 21 June, the United States devastated Iran's nuclear facilities to end Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity and stop the threat posed by the world's foremost State sponsor of terror, in support of Israel's right of collective self-defence. Now, with the United States-negotiated ceasefire having brought an end to the 12-day war, Tehran faces a choice. On the one hand, Iran can continue its current path of defying the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons-mandated safeguards obligations, in a bid to reconstitute its nuclear programme in secrecy. Already, Iran's law to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has obscured international visibility into its programme. Iran can also continue to route vital State resources to a network of proxies and partners abroad to undermine regional security.

Or, on the other hand, Iran can pursue a different course, ending its path to a nuclear weapon through meaningful, time-bound diplomacy. This track is the only means of realizing a durable peace and, with it, greater prosperity and global integration for Iran and its people. This path remains the path preferred by the United States; we urge Iran to take it.

In the absence of a deal, the United States continues to impose maximum diplomatic and economic pressure to constrain any activities, such as the pursuit of a nuclear weapon, that would threaten the security of United States citizens, personnel and partners in the region.

We emphasize the 1 July statement of the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers, which, first, reaffirmed that Iran can never have nuclear weapons and must refrain from reconstituting its unjustified enrichment activities; secondly, called upon Iran to urgently resume full cooperation with the IAEA, including by providing verifiable information about all nuclear material in Iran and providing access to IAEA inspectors; and thirdly, condemned the reprehensible calls in Iran for Director General Grossi's arrest and execution. The members of the Council and the world must stand united in ensuring Iran never obtains or develops a nuclear weapon.

The United States will do its part to help forge a new reality for the Middle East, alongside Israel and our Arab partners. It is our responsibility to realize the Middle East that earlier generations dreamt of — a region of peace, prosperity, safety, harmony, opportunity, innovation and achievement.

Mr. Sangjin Kim (Republic of Korea): I also join other colleagues in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his comprehensive briefing.

For millennia, the Middle East has been a crossroads of civilization, with its abundant historical, cultural and religious heritage. However, what we have been witnessing, for almost two years now, unfortunately represents a painful cycle of profound instability, the denial of coexistence and a total destruction of shared humanity.

Hamas committed the worst terrorist attacks against Israel and still brutally holds 50 hostages. Israel's air strikes and gunfire, as well as restrictions on humanitarian aid, are pushing Palestinian civilians in Gaza deeper into death and starvation. Not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank, the Palestinian people's right to life, dignity and coexistence is repeatedly being denied. In the wider Middle East region, sirens and air strikes have become the new normal.

Keeping in mind the pressing urgency in addressing these concerning realities, let me stress the following three points.

First, we call on all parties in the region, notably Israel and Hamas, to recover common humanity. The horrific casualties, including 17,000 children killed in Gaza; the hunger, chaos and killing in and around Gaza Humanitarian Foundation distribution sites; and the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including religious, health and United Nations sites, all elucidate staggering evidence of a loss of fundamental humanity. Meanwhile, we will not forget the terror and shock that Hamas inflicted on Israel on 7 October 2023. It is unconscionable that Hamas still holds hostages and remains in tunnels, with no regard for the fear and despair of civilians in Gaza. As starvation surges, we call on Israel to end all restrictions on humanitarian assistance and allow the United Nations to deliver life-saving aid to those in need throughout Gaza. In this respect, we reaffirm our strong support for all humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Both parties must protect civilians and faithfully engage in talks to secure an immediate ceasefire and release of hostages. The war in Gaza must end now.

Secondly, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims and Christians, must coexist in lasting peace and security. Any action that hinders this simple but clear proposition must immediately come to a halt. Violence by settlers in the West Bank, regardless of the nationality of the victims, is unacceptable and, therefore, all perpetrators must be held accountable in accordance with clear international standards. Israel must cease settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, which are contrary to international law and Security Council resolutions. We oppose the announcement by Israel about the resumption of E1 settlements. This will bifurcate a non-contiguous West Bank and further hamper future prospects for the two-State solution. We also reject calls to forcibly relocate Palestinians, in or outside Gaza, such as the so-called humanitarian city plan, slated for the rubble on which the city of Rafah once stood. We continue to extend our consistent support for efforts to revive the two-State solution.

Thirdly, all players must strive for de-escalation and stability throughout the region, through diplomacy. We call on key players in the region to adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for territorial sovereignty. All actions that further aggravate insecurity, either on land or sea, must stop. Amid the endless spillover of violence in the region, we must seek ways to achieve peace through dialogue and diplomacy. In particular, ongoing talks in the region on non-proliferation now provide us with an important moment for diplomacy. We therefore call on all parties in the region to seize any opportunity to secure regional peace and stability for the benefit of the people.

Mr. Mohamed Yusuf (Somalia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I express my country's appreciation for holding this open debate at a time when challenges facing the region of the Middle East are escalating and accumulated crises are becoming worse, without any drastic solutions. I would also like to thank Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, for his valuable briefing on current developments.

The occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the Gaza Strip, continues to witness one of the most terrible human tragedies of modern times. With the number of victims having exceeded 56,000, most of them women and children, the unprecedented destruction of civilian infrastructure and millions deprived of water, food and healthcare, it has become a moral and legal imperative to call for urgent and decisive action by the Security Council. The situation in Gaza has entered

a phase of actual famine, with daily cases of children and adults collapsing as a result of acute malnutrition, a large number of civilians dying owing to military action and others starving to death, in a scene that embodies a collective, moral and humanitarian failure. Civilians have even been deprived of a crumb of bread or a drop of water, in clear violation of the Geneva Conventions and all rules of international humanitarian law.

Somalia reiterates its demand for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, the lifting of the unjust blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and the guarantee of aid delivery in a sustainable and safe manner, in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law. We also reaffirm our unwavering position in support of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions. In that context, we welcome the initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and France at the end of this month to reaffirm the international consensus in support of the two-State solution and renew the commitment to collective action to that end.

In the occupied West Bank, the situation is worsening day by day, with illegal settlement expansion, repeated military incursions and daily attacks by settlers on Palestinian villages, farmers and property, in direct defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). We caution against the continuation of that trend, which directly undermines any prospects for the peace process, enshrines a colonial reality on the ground and deepens the feelings of frustration and anger among entire generations of Palestinians.

Regarding Syria, the ongoing crisis continues to cast its heavy shadow over millions of civilians. Despite that harsh reality, Somalia welcomes the ceasefire agreement in Suwayda Province, and we hope that it will be a stepping stone towards broader de-escalation. At the same time, however, we are deeply concerned about the repeated attacks on Syrian territories, including the recent bombing of Damascus and sites in southern Syria. The exploitation of some local conditions within the components of Syrian society does not in any way justify the violation of Syria's sovereignty. Such acts are a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and all international norms and endanger the stability of Syria and the entire region. We reaffirm our support for a comprehensive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

In Lebanon, the continued violations on the southern border necessitate compliance with resolution 1701 (2006), and we stress the importance of supporting all Lebanese State institutions, especially the Lebanese army, to safeguard the unity, security and stability of the State.

The escalation is no longer limited to a single arena. Over the past few months, we have seen repeated aggressions against Gaza, clashes in southern Lebanon and Yemen, attacks on Syria and a dangerous escalation between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran that lasted 12 days. We warn of the dire consequences of this pattern of multi-front regional escalation, which threatens to widen the conflict in the entire region and make it a constant and central source of tension and destabilization in the Middle East.

In conclusion, the stability and integrity of the Middle East region are inseparable from the stability of the international order as a whole. The recurrence of violations and the disregard of the sources of crises, including the permanent occupation of the Palestinian territories, only weakens the international legal system and encourages the logic of force and double standards. It is time for the Security Council to shoulder its historic responsibility, stand up to violations that threaten regional and international security and work to enable just and sustainable political solutions and the protection of civilians. Today we need the voice of law and the

solutions of justice, not the sound of weapons or exceptions. Adherence to the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations remains the most appropriate and successful framework for ensuring coexistence and stability in the Middle East and the world at large.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I thank you, Mr. President and Deputy Prime Minister Dar, and I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Slovenia firmly believes that peace is a choice. The only path to lasting peace in the Middle East is for military options to give way to diplomatic ones and for strategies of zero-sum games and terror to be replaced by the acceptance of a shared future. Let me make three points today.

First, we remain heartbroken about the situation in Gaza. We reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire. We demand the release of all hostages. We call for humanitarian aid to be delivered at scale across the Gaza Strip. The United Nations and its agencies are the only ones able to carry out that humongous task. They have proven that they can deliver, if not prevented. The scale of acute food insecurity, including starvation, is intolerable. More than 100 humanitarian organizations are sounding the alarm as mass starvation spreads across Gaza and their colleagues and those they serve are wasting away. Civilians are not starving; they are being starved, by Israel, as a weapon of war. We will closely follow the implementation of the European Union-Israel deal. We remain cautious as there is no real change on the ground yet. Only a significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will be the proof of Israel's commitment. Palestinian civilians continue to be killed while waiting for water and aid or seeking shelter, even in schools and religious sites. We resolutely condemn the attack on the Church of the Holy Family. United Nations and humanitarian workers continue to work in an unacceptably perilous security environment and to face intolerable operational challenges. They continue to be killed with impunity. We hear about investigations of incidents, but we never learn about their results. We condemn the latest attack on World Health Organization facilities and staff and call for the release of the detained staff member. We are appalled by the continuation of mass displacement orders.

It started with attacks on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), then extended to the Secretary-General and is now spreading to Under-Secretary-General Fletcher and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. What we heard today from Israel is a determination to prevent the United Nations and its humanitarian arm from helping starving civilians in the occupied territories, because, as my colleague from Algeria said, they tell the truth, because it is humanity whom they serve and they represent. What I hope that Israel heard today from Council members and will hear from the great majority of United Nations Member States later on is our determination not to allow the dismantlement of the system that we jointly built after the tragedies of the Second World War and that represents the face of humanity to millions of civilians across the world.

Secondly, we must not let Gaza overshadow the situation in the West Bank. There are unprecedented accounts of killings, demolitions, destruction, displacement and restrictions. Slovenia strongly opposes the revival of the E1 settlement plan and calls on Israel to cease activities that directly contradict the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion. Additional restrictions on UNRWA are being considered — an agency critical to the stability of all its areas of operation, which also encompass the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Maximum pressure is being exerted on the Palestinian Authority. In response to those acts and violations, Slovenia adopted further bilateral measures last week.

Thirdly, despite some reasons for optimism, the regional situation remains fragile, and the future uncertain. The resumption of the Houthis' attacks in the Red

Sea have potentially dire security, humanitarian, environmental and commercial consequences for Yemen and beyond. We reiterate our concern about the escalation of violence in Syria and renew our call for the protection of civilians and a full cessation of all violence across the country. We call on Israel to cease its attacks on Syria and adhere to the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. We welcome the progress seen in Lebanon in recent months. While challenges persist, the country needs continued support from the international community, including through the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We underline the need to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers and to respect their freedom of movement.

A region marked by instability and conflict needs reasons for optimism. It needs the status quo of past decades to be broken. As stressed so many times before, it needs international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, to be fully respected. We welcome the convening of the conference on the two-State solution next week and reiterate our full support. We call for clear actions and clear commitments. Only through a two-State solution, whereby two democratic States — Israel and Palestine — accept to live side by side can long-lasting peace in the region become a reality.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Péter Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

Mr. Szijjártó (Hungary): First of all, I would like to express gratitude on behalf of our Government to the Government of Pakistan and to you, Mr. President, for utilizing your presidency of the Security Council to urge all to refocus every effort on the peaceful settlement of all the disputes that have been going on all around the world. We appreciate it and we wish you all the best for the remaining time of your presidency and your presence here in the Council.

I represent a Central European country, and those of us who live there know very well that the security of Central Europe is very closely linked to the security of the Middle East. Therefore — and maybe this is a selfish approach — we are very much interested in peace, stability and security returning to the Middle East region. We wholeheartedly support the establishment of a ceasefire and a hostage deal in Israel for two reasons.

First, such an agreement could give a very fundamental human right back to the people living in the region, namely the right to a safe and secure life, without the threat of daily bombardments and daily rocket attacks. On the other hand, such an agreement could make it possible for the Hungarian hostage to be finally released by Hamas. We urge the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and we do hope that all the efforts aimed at giving all the hostages back their freedom will be successful. We all know that many attempts have been made in recent decades to bring stability and security back to the Middle East. Many of them were full of goodwill but were unsuccessful, with one exception: the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement, initiated by President Trump during his previous term. The Abraham Accords brought back the hope that nations and peoples in the Middle East can live together and next to each other in peace, without terrorist attacks. And we do hope that circumstances will allow President Trump to continue his efforts to expand the Abraham Accords. I can personally tell you, Mr. President, that I am proud to have been the only Foreign Minister in the world present at the signing of the first Abraham Accords in the gardens of the White House.

When I sit here, I speak not only on behalf of a Central European nation but also on behalf of a country that has a thousand-year long tradition of Christian statehood. Given that fact, we feel a sense of responsibility, and we give our support to all Christian communities all over the world, especially if they are under attack or are persecuted. Unfortunately, that happens in many places of the world, including in

the Middle East, where the Hungarian Government has financed 129 projects so far to help Christian communities with \$70 million. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the brutal massacres in Syria that targeted members of the Christian community without exception — children, elderly people, women and men. That is totally unacceptable, and those brutal terrorist attacks must be investigated thoroughly. We also regret what happened to the Holy Family Church, and here I want to say that we welcome the consultations between the Vatican and Israel that have just taken place. We do hope that all those negotiations aimed at sustainable food and medical supplies for the Christian community in Gaza will be successful. We ourselves try to be instrumental, and I take advantage of my friendly relations with Minister Saar. The Hungarian Government has given financial assistance to the Catholic Church to carry out its humanitarian and social programmes in Gaza as best it can.

Therefore, when it comes to the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East and when it comes to giving all the people in the Middle East back their right to live their lives without the threat of daily bombardments and terrorist attacks, the Council can count on Hungary.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment and Minister for Transport of Ireland.

Mr. O'Brien (Ireland): I thank Pakistan for convening today's meeting, and I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

It is with profound regret that we meet again, as this region continues to experience significant instability, with multiple crises playing out, many of which are interrelated and all of which threaten further escalation, further destruction and further devastating loss of civilian life.

I will first turn to the appalling and deteriorating situation in Gaza. Last week, the Council heard from Under-Secretary-General Fletcher (see S/PV.9959), who described soaring humanitarian needs in Gaza, where food is running out and those who seek it risk being killed, where a shattered health system lacks adequate medical equipment and essential medicines and where the critical civilian infrastructure, such as water and sanitation systems, is out of reach to those who so desperately need them.

Since the beginning of the war, more than 56,000 people are reported killed, and more than 132,000 have been reported injured. We heard the stark illustration by the Head of UNICEF, Executive Director Russell, last week, who drove home these numbers with the chilling illustration that the equivalent of 28 children, or one entire classroom of children, have lost their lives in Gaza every single day over the past 21 months.

We urgently need an end to hostilities. Ireland, in the strongest possible terms, once again condemns the terror attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023. Ireland, in the strongest possible terms, also condemns the unconscionable taking of hostages by Hamas and has repeatedly called for their release. And I repeat that call again today. Ireland urges all parties to support efforts to reach agreement on a new ceasefire and hostage release deal. Humanitarian aid must be allowed into and throughout Gaza at scale, and Ireland calls on Israel — again, in the strongest possible terms — to lift immediately the restrictions on the flow of aid and urgently enable the United Nations and humanitarian non-governmental organizations to do their life-saving work safely and effectively, in line with humanitarian principles.

In May, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification global hunger monitor reported that the entire population of Gaza is facing high levels of food insecurity, with half a million people facing starvation. Two months have passed without adequate action. The humanitarian situation remains catastrophic. We continue to see mass casualty incidents at distribution centres that are run by private contractors under the new Israeli-approved model of aid delivery. It is horrifying that more than 800 Palestinians have been killed while seeking aid. We must be clear: life-saving aid must never, ever be weaponized. Humanitarian principles must be followed. Hospitals must never be militarized and must never be targeted.

Ireland remains extremely concerned about the situation in the West Bank, where Israeli military operations continue. We are seeing unprecedented levels of violence, large-scale displacement of the Palestinian population and record levels of settlement construction, which is contrary to international law. The scale, speed and severity of this displacement is unprecedented. We strongly oppose any steps towards territorial or demographic change in the occupied Palestinian territories. Ireland remains convinced that the implementation of the two-State solution is the only way to establish lasting peace and stability and security for both Israel and Palestine and the wider region. We welcome the reconvening of the High-level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution in New York next week, to be co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia. We hope that the Conference will be a decisive moment for the international community to express commitment to preserving the two-State solution.

Ireland is deeply concerned about the situation in Syria and the disturbing intercommunal violence and killing of civilians in the south-west of the country. We urge all those involved to uphold the ceasefire. The safety and human rights of all Syrians must be upheld, irrespective of their faith or ethnicity.

We continue to be concerned about the overall security situation in the region, and it is imperative that the Lebanese Armed Forces are supported so as to provide security across Lebanon, including in the south, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon will continue to play an important role in this regard.

Ireland welcomes reports that Iran will engage with the European Union High Representative and the E3 — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — on its nuclear programme, and it is our hope that a negotiated solution can be found to address the legitimate concerns of the international community. Iran can and should contribute to regional security by clearly ceasing its support for non-State armed militant groups in the region.

It is clear that the military responses will not bring lasting solutions to any of the conflicts that afflict the region or achieve the peace and security that the peoples of the region crave and deserve. Ireland calls on the international community to come together to do all in its power to bring about a lasting and sustainable peace across the Middle East.

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

Mr. Gharibabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely open debate.

We address the Council amid the ongoing collapse of the international legal order and the erosion of the Charter of the United Nations. Over the past two years, the world has witnessed — with growing outrage — the brutality of the Israeli regime against the people of Palestine: tens of thousands killed or maimed, hospitals and schools bombed, United Nations staff and humanitarian workers murdered, millions

displaced and starvation weaponized against an entire population. These atrocities continue unabated and are intensifying daily.

Today, the situation has grown even more catastrophic. The Israeli regime has devised a systematic method of killing, deliberately targeting starving civilians as they await life-saving aid. This is not just cruelty; it is premeditated mass murder. What is unfolding in Gaza is not a conflict between equals. It is the organized and systematic annihilation of a besieged civilian population by an occupying regime, supported and shielded by the United States of America.

This is not merely a crisis. It is the defining humanitarian catastrophe of our time. The scale of suffering, the aggressor's impunity and the paralysis of the international community expose a complete breakdown of accountability. Since October 2023, more than 57,000 Palestinians — mostly women and children — have been killed. Nearly 2 million have been forcibly displaced. All of Gaza lies in ruins. Hospitals, United Nations shelters, schools and essential infrastructure have been deliberately attacked. Starvation is being used as a weapon of war.

Gaza remains a powerful symbol of unwavering resistance and a stark testament to enduring injustice. This truth is embodied in the extraordinary resilience of its people amid 22 months of relentless atrocities committed by the Israeli terrorist regime. Throughout this period, Israel and its criminal apparatus have employed every conceivable tool of repression, including the grotesque weaponization of thirst and hunger, against a defenceless civilian population. Yet, as always, they have failed to break the iron will of the Palestinian people.

The intentional targeting of starving civilians — those lining up for bread, water or humanitarian relief — is a flagrant war crime and a crime against humanity. The international community and Western States, especially the self-proclaimed champions of human rights in the West, cannot wash their hands of complicity. They must be held accountable for their silence, for their support and for the blood of more than 1,000 civilians massacred at so-called aid distribution centres, which have been turned into death traps by the United States and Israel. Western States have also failed in their obligations under common article 1 of the Geneva Conventions and the Genocide Convention. Their continued support has enabled the atrocities and blocked the Council from fulfilling its mandate.

Meanwhile, the situation in the occupied West Bank continues to deteriorate. Israel's expansion of illegal settlements, settler violence and institutionalized apartheid policies violate article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 2334 (2016) and are part of a broader strategy of permanent occupation and ethnic cleansing.

The threat posed by the Israeli regime goes far beyond Gaza and Palestine. As I detailed in my statement yesterday before the Chamber (see S/PV.9962), Israel, in full cooperation and complicity with the United States, has carried out a series of unprovoked and unlawful military attacks against the Islamic Republic of Iran, targeting nuclear, civilian and vital infrastructure. These attacks resulted in civilian casualties and struck facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. They constitute a clear and grave violation of Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter and customary international law. Wider Member States have widely condemned these acts of aggression as a grave threat to regional and international peace and security.

At the same time, Israel continues to flagrantly violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic by occupying Syrian territory and pursuing illegal annexation and settlement expansion, openly defying the United Nations Charter and relevant Security Council resolutions.

This regime also persists in violating the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon, with near-daily breaches of Lebanese airspace, indiscriminate attacks and the ongoing occupation of five border positions, all in direct violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Moreover, the Israeli regime has carried out acts of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen, targeting civilian infrastructure and further deepening the country's already dire humanitarian crisis.

In the light of these grave violations by the Israeli regime, which pose a clear and growing threat to regional and international peace and security, we call on the Council to take urgent and decisive action.

First, the Council must demand an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and all occupied Palestinian territories.

Secondly, the Council must ensure unimpeded humanitarian access, the safe return of displaced persons and the release of all arbitrarily detained Palestinians.

Thirdly, the Council must reject all schemes of forced displacement, buffer zones, or third-country resettlement.

Fourthly, the Council must support full United Nations membership for the State of Palestine and reaffirm the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Fifthly, the Council must enforce Israel's withdrawal from all occupied territories.

Sixthly, the Council must condemn and hold Israel fully accountable for its acts of aggression and atrocities against the nations of the region, committed in flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and fundamental principles of international law.

We also call on all countries, individually and collectively, to take whatever action they can to pressure the Israeli regime to stop its crimes. In this regard, I propose that each country establish, declare and follow through on a commitment to this end.

The Security Council must not remain silent in the face of genocide and aggression. The protection of civilians and the maintenance of peace are legal and moral imperatives — not political options. Failure to act will not only betray the Palestinian people — it will permanently damage the Council's credibility and the future of the international legal order.

Today, the representative of the United States made a desperate attempt in the Council to distort reality and justify her country's act of aggression against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities, portraying it as legitimate and misrepresenting Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to international peace and security. However, the facts are clear and they speak for themselves.

Yesterday in the Council I elaborated on the root causes of the current situation. The United States attack on Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities was a blatant violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, resolution 2231 (2015) and IAEA resolutions. It also dealt a serious blow to the global non-proliferation regime. Furthermore, the United States, alongside the Israeli regime, is currently the main source of instability and insecurity in the region and a major threat to international peace and security. The United States representative is, therefore, in no moral, political or legal position to lecture or blame Iran.

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

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

Bangladesh is deeply concerned at the escalation of violence and the immense suffering of innocent civilians in Gaza. Since the beginning of this mindless massacre, more than 58,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children. Israel has been using forced starvation and displacement to continue ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, by design. Much of the territory now lies devastated, with the complete destruction of infrastructure necessary to sustain life.

We strongly condemn this genocidal killing and settler violence in the occupied West Bank, defying the repeated appeals of the international community. We also strongly oppose Israel's plan to drive starving and thirsty Gazans to the so-called humanitarian city, which the former Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ehud Olmert, condemned as nothing but a concentration camp. We also call for the strengthening of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The international community must implement the order of the International Court of Justice to take all necessary measures to prevent genocide in Gaza.

Bangladesh will continue to advocate for the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We firmly believe that this is the only sustainable solution to the crisis in the Middle East. We also urge the Security Council to take immediate action to recommend the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

We endorse the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. We remain steadfast and unequivocal in our call on the global community to work towards a two-State solution of the Palestinian issue, based on international law, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, United Nations resolutions and the Palestinian aspirations for peace, dignity and justice. To this end, we condemn the Israeli parliament's decision to oppose the creation of an independent State of Palestine. We welcome 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, next week, under the co-chairmanship of Saudi Arabia and France, with the aim of accelerating the process of implementing the two-State solution.

Bangladesh strongly believes that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any State is inviolable. We reiterate our condemnation of the recent unprovoked Israeli bombings in Syria, Iran and Lebanon. Israel must also end its illegal occupation in Syria and Lebanon. Bangladesh reiterates its long-standing position in favour of the peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy.

In conclusion, Bangladesh calls on the United Nations and the international community to engage proactively in efforts to de-escalate tension and promote peace and stability in the Middle East. In the Council, we once again urge everyone to stop all forms of armed hostilities and violent repression against the Palestinian people and other nations. Otherwise, future generations will never forgive us. Let us reaffirm our commitment to peace and say never again to violence, war and genocide.

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 the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.