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President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 15

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/63/361 and A/63/368)

Draft resolutions (A/63/L.36 and A/63/L.37)

The Acting President: I call first on the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/63/L.36 and A/63/L.37.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Under this agenda item we address the ongoing conflict situation in the Middle East region resulting from Israel's continuing occupation of the Arab territories since 1967 and its non-compliance with relevant United Nations resolutions and relevant provisions of international law.

Israel continues to occupy Palestinian and Arab territories, despite all international and regional efforts to reach a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Middle East conflict. As we near the end of 2008, the Annapolis Conference decisions remain unimplemented.

The situation in the Middle East necessitates intense action by the international community, as

represented in the General Assembly, to advance the final status negotiations on the Palestinian track and to emphasize the irreversibility of the peace process. This is needed in order to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant United Nations resolutions.

In this regard, the General Assembly adopts at this time of year, under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East", two very important draft resolutions to express the international community's rejection of Israel's continuing occupation and unlawful practices in the occupied Arab territories.

Draft resolution A/63/L.36 concerns the question of Jerusalem. All relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have confirmed the necessity of maintaining the city's special status and the illegality of any measures by consecutive Israeli Governments to alter that status before concluding the final status negotiations.

Draft resolution A/63/L.37, dealing with the occupied Syrian Golan, confirms the will and determination of the international community to end Israel's illegal occupation of Syrian territory and achieve full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967.

Implementing the Annapolis understandings and achieving a peace agreement will undoubtedly lead to the establishment of an independent viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the West

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Bank and the Gaza Strip territories, within a specific and agreed timeline. It will also provide the appropriate environment for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and an end to Israel's illegal occupation of all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Shabaa Farms.

The achievement of peace on the Palestinian track and a comprehensive settlement will permit the establishment of peaceful, normal relations between the Arabs and Israel according to the letter and spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, based on the idea of full withdrawal and settlement of the issue of refugees in return for full peace.

Achieving the goal of comprehensive peace depends on a sincere commitment by Israel to attain the desired peaceful settlement. Israel should cease its military escalation and its unlawful practices in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan, including all forms of collective punishment imposed on the civilian population, and express a real political will to settle the core issue of the final status on the Palestinian track. That includes finding a just, agreed solution of the refugee question on the basis of resolution 194 (III).

Similarly, we look forward to more progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track, in order that direct peace talks between the two sides may resume and so that it will be possible to reach an agreement leading to Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, on the basis of all related terms of reference and results reached during previous negotiating rounds.

We also look forward to the efforts by the new American Administration to advance the Middle East peace process and, together with the other members of the Quartet, to pursue the two-State solution. The Quartet bears the responsibility of following the implementation of the two-State solution, working to end Israel's occupation of the Arab territories occupied since 1967 and establishing an independent Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

I have pleasure in introducing the two draft resolutions under agenda item 15: draft resolution A/63/L.36, concerning Jerusalem, and draft resolution A/36/L.37, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

By draft resolution A/63/L.36, the General Assembly would reaffirm that the relevant Assembly and Security Council resolutions remain the main terms of reference for the special status of occupied East Jerusalem, confirming the renunciation and repudiation of all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal status and character of Jerusalem. Moreover, it would confirm that any just and comprehensive solution of the question of this Holy City must take into consideration the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and must include provisions on international guarantees ensuring freedom of belief and religion to its inhabitants, with no illegal attempts by Israel to Judaize the city, in gross violation of its inhabitant's right to free worship.

By draft resolution A/63/L.37, on the occupied Syrian Golan, the Assembly would reaffirm Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and highlight concern over Israel's continued non-compliance. It would also confirm the applicability of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to the Syrian territory occupied since 1967, as well as the illegitimacy of both the decision to apply Israeli laws on the territory and the settlement activities there. It would also renew calls upon Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967, resume direct peace negotiations on the Syrian track and respect commitments made previously.

The sponsors of the two draft resolutions believe that it is high time for the international community to deal with the complex situation in the Middle East in a comprehensive regional framework.

The peoples of the region have long suffered from the scourge of war and disasters caused by aggression. They aspire to achieve peace, stability and long-term development. That is not possible without international determination to provide the required political support to realize full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, on the basis of international law, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, and all terms of reference set out in the Madrid principles and relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

For the reasons that I have set out, the sponsors look forward to all Member States voting in favour of

the two draft resolutions, in order to express the international will that I have described and to promote the lofty purposes and principles of the Charter, endorsed through the years by the Member States.

Ms. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The unstable situation in the Middle East resulting from Israel's continued military occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 continues to be a matter of serious concern, not only for the region, but also for the whole international community.

Since last year the situation has been further exacerbated by Israel's continued pursuit of illegal policies and practices, including unrelenting military attacks against Palestinian civilians and property; the uninterrupted construction of settlements and a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; the continued imposition of all forms of inhumane and unlawful collective punishment measures on the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in the Gaza Strip; and the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan. The situation in Lebanon also remains complex.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its deep regret that since 1967, for 41 years now, the Palestinian people have continuously suffered under the brutal Israeli occupation of their land, and that they continue to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination and the right of refugees to return to their homes.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses that the main impediment to the exercise of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and the achievement of a two-State solution for peace continues to be Israel's unlawful settlements campaign, which includes unlimited confiscation of land, the construction and expansion of settlements, the movement of settlers, the construction of the wall, the construction of Israelis-only bypass roads, and the imposition of a permit regime and other severe restrictions on movement in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

In addition, the Movement is alarmed over the rising incidence of acts of violence, harassment and intimidation by Israeli settlers against Palestinian

civilians, their property and agricultural land. The Movement calls upon the occupying Power to take all necessary measures to end the settlers' violence and lawlessness, and to hold the perpetrators of crimes against Palestinian civilians accountable for their actions.

The Movement reiterates its strong condemnation of all illegal Israeli settlement activities and colonization measures, including those in and around East Jerusalem and the Jordan valley, aimed at the illegal de facto annexation of more Palestinian land. It calls for the immediate complete cessation of all such illegal activities, for Israel's compliance with all its obligations under international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and for full respect for its commitments in this regard in the context of the peace process.

Furthermore, the Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's continued flagrant defiance of, and failure to respect, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and Israel's violation of resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, which reaffirms the illegality of the construction of the separation wall on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. The Non-Aligned Movement is still seriously concerned about the enormous physical, economic and social devastation caused by the wall, which divides the occupied Palestinian territory into isolated, enclosed cantons, destroying entire communities and separating East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory. We again demand that Israel, the occupying Power, scrupulously respect its obligations as set out in the advisory opinion and comply with resolution ES-10/15.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation on its territory following Israel's brutal aggression and serious violations of Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its satisfaction at the steps the Lebanese Government has taken to implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement also welcomes the deployment of Lebanese armed forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon in order to ensure security and stability there.

The Movement remains deeply concerned about Israel's constant land and air violations of the Blue Line, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We urge Israel to end its occupation of the

northern part of Ghajar, on the northern side of the Blue Line, and to immediately refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty or of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and to refrain from any provocation of the Lebanese armed forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The Movement calls for a speedy settlement of the question of the Shab'a farms, with full respect for Lebanon's territorial integrity, as stipulated in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We call on all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area, and we note the Secretary-General's important endeavours in that regard.

The Movement is acutely aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon as a result of the 1.2 million cluster bombs dropped by Israel during its attack on Lebanon. It once again condemns the use of such weapons by Israel, and deplores the resultant toll in dead and injured. The Movement urges Israel to provide the exact location of those deadly weapons as well as maps of the minefields it created during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Movement congratulates the people and leaders of Lebanon, and fully supports the agreement reached in Doha on 21 May this year. In this regard, it welcomes the election of the new President of the Republic, the establishment of a Cabinet of national unity, and the adoption of the electoral law. The Movement also welcomes the convening of two sessions of the national dialogue on means to strengthen the authority of the State over all its territory, in such a way as to guarantee the sovereignty and security of the State and the people of Lebanon. The Movement also welcomes the agreement to ban the use of weapons and violence as a means to settle disputes.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all the measures and actions that Israel, the occupying Power, has taken, or is about to take, purporting to modify the legal, physical and demographic condition, and the institutional structure, of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the measures to implement its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void, and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all those measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, are a clear violation of international law,

international agreements, the United Nations Charter and decisions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. They are also a challenge to the international community.

The Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967.

The members of the Non-Aligned Movement condemn the act of aggression committed by United States forces in Iraq against the Syrian Arab Republic on 26 October 2008, and express their deep concern over the negative consequences of that action for peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

The Movement also expresses its deep concern over the scant progress in the peace process, which was relaunched following the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 and the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Despite the ongoing negotiations and meetings between them, the process continues to be obstructed and undermined by Israel's continued pursuit of illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and its flouting of the commitments it has made in the peace process.

The Movement calls upon all the parties involved, including the Quartet, to make the necessary efforts to promote the peace process and thus achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace. In that regard, it strongly rejects attempts to modify the mandate of the peace process and the unceasing imposition of illegal unilateral measures and strategies by Israel, the occupying Power, intended to impose an illegal unilateral solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its intention to continue to support — and contribute in all possible ways to — the achievement of a just, complete and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is discussing today an important item on its agenda, closely related to international peace and security.

The Middle East region, despite its importance, has not enjoyed stability for many decades, as a result of the wars that have bedevilled it and drained its energies and resources.

Perhaps the most outstanding threat to the region's security and stability is the persistence of Israel, the occupying Power, in its illegal policies and practices. Israel aggressively continues its illegal settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, by confiscating lands, building and expanding settlements and transferring hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers. At the same time, extremist armed settlers intensify their terrorist acts against Palestinian civilians, unlawfully seizing their homes, land and possessions under the eyes of the occupation forces.

The aim is to impose a new *de facto* situation on the ground by altering the demographics and nature of the occupied Palestinian territories in order to facilitate the actual annexation of large areas of land. This situation is a dangerous obstacle to the peace process and is a flagrant violation of Israel's clear commitments.

Israel has persisted in its hostile practices, represented in daily campaigns of arrest, assassinations, the demolition of homes and the closure of crossing points, with the continued application of its policy of siege, collective punishment and arbitrary detentions. It also continues to build the separation wall, despite the confirmation by the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, that its construction was contrary to international law. The Court demanded that the wall be dismantled and that reparation be made to Palestinians who had suffered damages caused by its construction.

All the practices that I have described are a clear, flagrant violation of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The States parties to the Convention must take the necessary tangible measures to activate its provisions as part of their commitment to ensure Israel's respect for the Convention.

The suffering of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip continues, as Israel persists in imposing its

siege and depriving it of supplies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned that Gaza will face a human catastrophe, should the closure of the crossing points continue, while stocks of food and medicine are being depleted. In addition, the loss of electrical power threatens to paralyse hospitals completely. UNRWA has also described the siege as shameful and unacceptable.

Kuwait calls on the international community to act swiftly to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, by working to end the Israeli siege, open the crossing points and allow fuel, food and humanitarian supplies to reach the population of Gaza.

Although more than 40 years have elapsed since the Israeli occupation began, the conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, remain very grave. Humanitarian and economic conditions are deteriorating at all levels. The Palestinian people are still struggling to realize the inalienable rights that they should enjoy, including the right to self-determination.

In this regard, Kuwait renews its commitment to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to realize all their legitimate political rights by establishing their own independent State, on their own land, with Jerusalem as its capital. It also reaffirms that, unless the Palestinian people obtain their legitimate rights in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, notably resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, there will be no lasting, comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question, which represents the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Kuwait renews its demand that Israel withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. It emphasizes the illegitimacy of all Israeli activities in the occupied Golan and stresses that the continued occupation and annexation of the Golan Heights are a real impediment to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

With regard to the Lebanese question, we renew Kuwait's commitment to stand by Lebanon and support it in preserving its security, unity, territorial integrity and political independence. We also demand that Israel cease its continued violations of Lebanese air space

and territory, and implement all the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We call upon the international community to assist and support the Lebanese Government in exercising its authority over all its territory.

The Annapolis Conference, hosted by the United States in November last year with the participation of all the main parties, gave a new incentive to achieving a just, permanent and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. It also represented an important and serious resurgence of the efforts to put an end to the occupation and establish a Palestinian State before the end of this year. However, this target date has almost arrived. The Palestinian and Israeli sides have been unable to reach agreement, and possibly will not be able to do so before the target date. But the peace process should not stop; it should continue until a peaceful settlement is reached, at the earliest possible date.

While the State of Kuwait affirms the importance of maintaining the impetus given by the Annapolis Conference, it stresses the need to discuss all the tracks, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, as well as the three vital questions that the Israeli side must deal with extremely seriously in future negotiations: Jerusalem; an end to the construction of settlements; and the right of return for the refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III).

The change of Israeli Government must not be a justification to freeze the negotiating process. Until the general elections in Israel are held next February, the current Israeli Government must continue its negotiations with the Palestinians to reach a peace agreement, to be completed by the incoming Israeli Government, regardless of its policies, for there is no alternative to continuing the dialogue to reach a just, permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, with a commitment to the two-States solution, under which they can live in peace side by side.

The next few months will test how serious the Israeli side is about achieving peace. The latest declarations by Israeli officials on their readiness to acknowledge the Arab Peace Initiative will be of no real value and will have no clear impact on the whole peace process, unless they are followed by serious actions and practical measures on the ground.

We hope that the upcoming meeting of the Quartet in Moscow next March on peace in Middle

East will be a step forward in the peace process and will give it a new momentum, in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This debate on the situation in the Middle East coincides with the sixtieth anniversary of al-Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. Since 1947 the United Nations, and in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, have not ceased to deal with many aspects of the situation in the Middle East. The General Assembly initiated consideration of the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East at its twenty-fifth session, in 1970, and it has continued to consider it until today.

At each session the Assembly has called on Israel to put an end to its occupation of Arab territory, and has stressed that all measures in occupied Arab territory by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its jurisdiction, laws and administration in Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan are illegal, with no legitimacy whatsoever, and are considered null and void.

In repeated resolutions and decisions, the Assembly has conformed with the position unanimously adopted by the Security Council in its resolutions 478 (1980), on occupied Jerusalem, and 497 (1981), on the occupied Syrian Golan. In those resolutions the Council rejected the annexation by Israel of Jerusalem and the Golan, and considered the annexation null and void and without any legal grounds.

Syria has expressed its will to work for peace as a strategic option since its participation in the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative, announced at the Beirut summit of 2002. The initiative was an unambiguous expression of the will of Arab States to achieve peace if Israel expresses its willingness to respond to what is needed for that peace — primarily withdrawing from occupied territories to the 4 June 1967 line and the installation of Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian State.

The summit held in Damascus on 29 March this year saw a reiteration by Arab leaders of their determination to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region, based on international law, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles of the Madrid Conference. Israel reacted to the Arab initiative by

invading the West Bank, carrying out massacres in Jenin and Nablus, laying siege to the defenceless Palestinian people, murdering women and children, soiling the holy places, and carrying out a collective punishment and a scorched earth campaign in the occupied territories.

Israel has continued to create settlements, despite the international rejection of them, and has continued to build the racist separation wall between itself and the occupied Palestinian territory in spite of the International Court of Justice advisory opinions. Israel also savagely attacked Lebanon in 2006 in order to reverse the progress towards peace and to undermine all peace efforts.

International law is represented by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the specialized agencies of the United Nations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the Human Rights Council, among many others. They have adopted hundreds of resolutions condemning the continued occupation of Arab territories and calling for an immediate withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967. Those resolutions include, for example, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980), 487 (1981) and 497 (1981). There are many resolutions that today are among the international references recognized as a basis for the peace process.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 194 (III) on the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, as well as resolution 273 (III), which defined the conditions for Israel to join the United Nations.

The situation in the Middle East and the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories were also the direct reason for a broad range of jurisprudence that has been enshrined in international law. That jurisprudence, which constitutes a reference framework, results from resolutions such as resolution 3314 (XXIX), defining crimes of aggression; resolution 3263 (XXIX) on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East; resolution 46/51 on measures to eliminate international terrorism; and resolution ES-10/14, adopted in 2003, in which the General Assembly requested the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the

construction of the separation wall built by Israel in occupied Palestinian territory.

The United Nations cannot forget the number of times Israel has refused to admit inquiry commissions of the United Nations. We cannot tolerate the number of times that Israel has refused to allow United Nations rapporteurs to visit occupied Arab territories. The United Nations cannot overlook, either, the number of members of United Nations personnel and peacekeeping forces who have died in the field under fire from Israeli forces. How can the United Nations forget the treatment inflicted by Israel on people in prominent international positions, such as Count Bernadotte, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Finnish President, President Carter and the special rapporteurs John Ziegler, Richard Falk and others?

Nevertheless, the most important issue is whether Israel could have refused to abide by the decisions of this international body had it not been for the use of the right of veto by an influential country against 44 separate draft resolutions condemning Israel's occupation of Arab territory. In spite of international efforts, good intentions and difficult decisions, nothing has put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories or halted the relentless stream of war, violence and aggression and pillage of human, development and economic resources. The questions that I ask today are: "Why is there this failure? Who is responsible for it? What will bring us out of this impasse?"

The President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, was right to say in his opening statement that the greatest failure of the United Nations was non-resolution of the Palestinian situation. Those who did not allow the United Nations to implement its decisions on putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories have a political and moral responsibility, and are accountable. If it had not been for those countries' insistence on giving Israel an exemption from international law it would not have been able to transform its military occupation into settler colonization, with de facto annexation of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian territory.

The truth is that, as President Assad has said, peace has never been the main concern of Israeli governments. Israel's only concern is its security, its own security; the security of Israel alone is paramount.

It can only be achieved, in their view, at the cost of our security and our rights.

It is illogical and unacceptable that the United Nations asks us, the Arabs, to continue providing proof of our will for peace, in spite of the fact that we have expressed it on countless occasions since the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. The Israelis must provide proof. They must demonstrate their will for peace, and they must try to convince us, the Arabs, of that will. For they are the ones occupying our lands, committing acts of aggression against our peoples, and turning millions of our citizens into refugees. It is not the contrary. They commit all of these acts and then call for protection guarantees as a means of blackmailing us for even more concessions.

In spite of all this, pending the withdrawal of Israeli forces from our occupied Golan to the 4 June, 1967 borders, which is a priority for us as a nation, we have undertaken indirect talks with Israel, with Turkish mediation, in the hope that, as our President has said, doing so will create a basis for us to undertake direct negotiations under the aegis of many international authorities. However, this calls for real will from Israel to respond to the requirements for achieving peace. It also calls for the United States to have the will to make peace in the Middle East a priority, going beyond the negligence and indifference that have existed for so long and have done nothing but lead to a further deterioration of the situation in our region.

Israel continues to occupy the Syrian Golan, in defiance of international decisions, resolution 497 (1981) and General Assembly resolution 62/85, which considers that the occupation of the Golan Heights and its de facto annexation represent two obstacles to a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Israel is continuing to pillage the natural resources in the Golan, steal our water and plant landmines, which have injured 589 individuals, including 17 children. Israel is also continuing to bury nuclear waste in the occupied Syrian Golan.

We have raised these serious issues within the United Nations and its specialized agencies. We still await from them measures taken in the framework of their mandates and in accordance with the Charter and international law.

The United States occupying forces in Iraq on 26 October this year carried out an act of aggression

against Syria. In Bukamal they attacked a civilian building, firing on workers in the building and killing eight Syrian civilians and injuring one. That unjustified aggression was a serious violation of Syria's sovereignty and of the purposes and principles of the Charter. It demonstrates the current United States Administration's determination to continue its policies, which have brought only death and destruction to the region. Those policies, which have also poured oil on the fires in our region, have led to chaos and instability.

Syria believes in international legality and recourse to the United Nations and its Security Council in order to allow those institutions to assume their responsibilities, thus avoiding a repetition of the violations I have described by making the American aggressor take responsibility for the death of those innocent Syrians and for keeping peace and security in the Middle East.

Mr. Mubarak (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Sixty-one years ago the Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning historic Palestine and displacing more than half its population after dispossessing them of their land and property.

The historic injustices imposed on the Palestinian people did not end there, since the United Nations recognized the State established on the usurped land and deprived the Palestinians, the rightful holders of the land, of their rights. Continued systematic violations of human rights continued, and with them the suffering of the Palestinians. Partition coincided with the adoption a year later of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as if the Palestinian people are not supposed to be covered by the Declaration. It is a painful irony that the adoption of the Declaration coincided with the *Nakba*, the displacement of the Palestinian people, who were deprived of all their inalienable rights, particularly their right to self-determination and national independence.

The Palestinians are still struggling to establish their own independent State on 22 per cent of the historic land of Palestine. The occupation authorities are redoubling settlement activities, granting permission for the construction of settlements inside occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and turning a blind eye to the crimes perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinian

civilians in an attempt to force the Palestinians to flee their land and their property.

The occupation authorities continue to build the racist separation wall, which occupies big chunks of Palestinian land, thus shrinking the land available and leaving less than 12 per cent to the Palestinian people of the historic land of Palestine, despite the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion of July 2004 and the resolutions of the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, which stipulate that the construction of the racist separation wall is contrary to international law. The occupation authorities still behave as if they were above the law, disparaging the advisory opinion, which states that Israel's pretexts for building the wall are founded on baseless security allegations, and that the main reason for building it is the occupation authorities' wish to annex more land and water sources and other natural resources.

The basic objective behind the separation wall is to impose a final shape on the Palestinians and the international community by annexing settlements inside the West Bank, demarking the final boundaries unilaterally. This undermines any attempt to establish a contiguous, viable Palestinian State, thus eliminating any prospects for peace.

The Zionist escalation and the State terrorism of the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people are embodied in the blockade of the Gaza Strip; the continuous assassination campaigns and incursions; the arrest of more than ten thousand Palestinians, including hundreds of women, children and the elderly, as well as a number of officials of the Palestinian Legislative Council; recurrent military incursions into Palestinian land; the terrorization of civilians; the confiscation of property and arable land; and the bulldozing of crops. In addition, the installation of barriers and checkpoints impedes the movement of Palestinian citizens and the delivery of goods to Palestinian cities and villages. The actions are part and parcel of a systematic policy to tighten Israel's grip on the Palestinian land it occupied in 1967 with a view to seizing further land and annexing it *de facto*.

The continued blockade of the Gaza Strip threatens all aspects, whether social, economic or health, of the lives of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. Unemployment is spreading, now amounting to more than 70 per cent. Poverty rates have increased to 80 per cent. This is in addition to the environmental disaster that threatens the Strip, given the destruction of fuel supplies, the accumulation of waste and the non-provision of potable water. This is a clear contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the treatment of civilians under occupation.

The influential actors ignore these facts, particularly in the Security Council, given the unbalanced and prejudicial positions adopted by some members, despite all the international appeals, warnings and predictions of a humanitarian disaster if the situation continues, most recently in statements by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNWRA), the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General.

My delegation emphasizes the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of return of all Palestinian refugees, their right to struggle for the restitution of their rights guaranteed by international laws and instruments and their right to take all legitimate measures, including resisting occupation. Any attempt to equate resisting Israeli occupation with terrorism is a distortion of facts and a denial of the Charter and its principles.

No reasonable person can dispute Israeli intentions with regard to peace. After the Annapolis Conference the occupation authorities intensified their brutal aggression, including massacres, against the Palestinian people. They also redoubled their settlement activities, giving permits to build further settlements in Jabal Abu Ghoneim and East Jerusalem, immediately after the Annapolis Conference. That runs counter to the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, which call for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities. It is a continuous Israeli practice to impose a new *fait accompli* to complicate any efforts to achieve a just settlement. It is also intended to derail all the work of all the parties from the track of peace by involving them in new or staged crises. There is no attempt to reform outmoded illegal situations or to eliminate the new reality.

Peace can be achieved only through Israel's unconditional full withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the occupied Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory, including the Sheba'a Farms and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village, and through the establishment of a viable independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds as its capital, with boundaries recognized in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. This will enable the Palestinian people to obtain their inalienable rights, particularly the right of refugees to return.

The United Nations must not devolve its historic responsibility for the question of Palestine until all its aspects are addressed. The Security Council, entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, is urgently called upon to find the necessary means to implement the relevant resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

The President of the Assembly was right when he said in his opening statement that the biggest failure of the United Nations was its failure to solve the question of Palestine.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): In many regards, the situation in the Middle East has benefited from encouraging developments. In particular, Switzerland welcomes the recent developments in Lebanon, especially the Doha Agreement. The announcement of the opening of Lebanese and Syrian diplomatic missions in Damascus and Beirut respectively, as well as of the reinstatement of the Commission on missing persons, have given added momentum to this process. The indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel under the aegis of Turkey are also a positive sign. We call on the States concerned to seize such opportunities, which make more credible the prospect of a peaceful future for the region. Switzerland also welcomes the efforts of the countries of the region to host and protect the some 7 million refugees.

However, we note a continued deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are especially concerned by the tighter restrictions on the movement of people, the expansion of Israeli settlements, the ongoing construction of the separation wall and the destruction of Palestinian houses for administrative motives in the West Bank. These measures contribute to further political and social

fragmentation and hamper economic development. They also undermine the unity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, comprising the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and are further obstacles to peace.

We reiterate our appeal for an immediate halt to both the expansion of settlements and the construction of the separation wall, and call for them to be dismantled. We recall that the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable in this context.

With regard to Gaza, we call on the parties to respect the ceasefire, including preventing the firing of rockets at civilians or civilian objects. We demand the immediate lifting of the blockade, whose consequences, particularly in the humanitarian field, are devastating.

Switzerland calls on the parties to the conflict to honour scrupulously their obligations with regard to the Road Map, international humanitarian law and human rights. The attacks against civilians on both sides dismay us. The outbreak of violence between Arab and Jewish communities in the north of Israel and the increasingly violent behaviour of some settlers prove that the lack of a settlement of the conflict increases instability within different segments of the population.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation will be a cornerstone of a future Palestinian State. We welcome efforts for a sustainable agreement, such as those made by Egypt. We encourage all the parties concerned to credibly engage in the ongoing efforts.

The Assembly, like other United Nations bodies, deals almost constantly with the Arab-Israeli conflict. We have adopted numerous resolutions. Yet, in spite of six decades of efforts by the international community, there is still no peace and stability in the region. The Palestinian refugees still live mostly in camps; the Palestinian territory is becoming increasingly fragmented; and Israel continues to live in insecurity.

It is therefore high time to end this tragedy. The solutions are known, and they are possible. The impact on the whole region of their realization would be immense — in terms of the lives of individuals, of course, but also in social, economic and environmental terms. The fruits of a future in which two viable States live side by side in peace and security vastly outweigh the efforts needed to overcome the current deadlock.

Mr. Shervani (India): We are grateful to the President for scheduling this discussion on an important subject that demands our collective attention: the situation in the Middle East. The discussion is appropriately timed, as it follows yesterday's commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

As a nation with age-old historic and cultural connections to each of the communities that make up the Middle East, India has an abiding interest in the early resolution of a problem that has troubled the region since the inception of the United Nations. India follows with close concern developments in the ancient and holy land under debate. We have perused with attention the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East (A/63/361) and on a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/63/368).

For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause was a cornerstone of our foreign policy even prior to our own independence. We recognize that a resolution of the problems in the Middle East begins with addressing the question of Palestine. However, we are also aware that genuine peace in the region also requires resolution of other issues on the remaining tracks of the Middle East Peace process, including restoration of other Arab lands that remain under occupation.

It is in this context that, despite the hope engendered by the Annapolis meeting almost exactly a year ago, the lack of substantive progress remains a matter of abiding concern. Despite praiseworthy efforts within the region to resolve divisions in the Palestinian community, the situation created by the events of June 2007 persists.

We watch with grave concern as Gaza remains cut off, and barriers to free movement persist in the West Bank. These problems are accentuated by the relentless expansion of the separation wall, in the face of international opinion, and of illegal settlements in the occupied territories. Such activities create new facts on the ground and fresh grievances in an old conflict, and can only have the effect of making any future solution harder to reach.

At the same time, the expansion of Palestinian capacity to secure towns on the West Bank is paralleled by a rise in violence perpetrated by settlers. All acts of violence — no matter by whom — only vitiate the

atmosphere for a result-oriented dialogue based on trust, without which no solution is possible. This is in no party's interest, as it makes it hard for the parties to make the necessary compromises to resolve the key issues relating to an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, a solution to the problem of refugees, and the question of Jerusalem.

At the same time, several of the fundamental issues relating to the occupation of other Arab territories in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan remain unresolved. These too add to a sense of frustration and desperation within the affected States. Such issues have the potential of exacting an immediate and long-term impact on the lives of the people, potentially contributing more fuel to an already combustible situation.

It is for this reason that India consistently urges all parties to eschew violence and exercise restraint. All too frequently, violence has broken out, exacerbating suffering and misery in the region, with profound repercussions for the entire world.

The international community clearly has an immediate interest in a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the problems besetting the Middle East. Under the present circumstances, the possibility of creating a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine seems difficult. And yet the international community is committed to it, through its relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and through Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Our collective commitment can only be meaningful if we collectively strive to ensure that all parties to the conflict abide by their commitments under the Road Map. We therefore urge the Quartet to do much more to push the process forward towards the desired outcome at the earliest. India continues to support a political solution, based on the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which remain the main and widely endorsed frameworks for an agreement.

While resolution of the six-decade-long tragedy of Palestine will have an important impact on the situation in the Middle East, as I noted earlier, peace in the Middle East also requires forward movement on other tracks of the peace process. India is encouraged by the regional efforts to resume the process of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and we commend in particular the effort facilitated by Turkey

to re-energize the Syria-Israel track. We look forward to the early resolution through dialogue of the long-standing occupation of the Syrian Golan, to which the General Assembly annually commits itself.

At the same time, India recognizes the important progress made by the countries of the region in assisting resolution of the political confrontation within Lebanon earlier this year. This creditable effort was an important step towards returning Lebanon to the path of stability and economic development. We commend Qatar for its role in this regard.

We also welcome the decision to establish diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon as a positive step in ensuring regional support for the stabilization of Lebanon. In the coming months it will be essential for the international community to support the positive steps taken since the election of a President of the Lebanese republic, including through expansion of assistance in building Government capacity to fully assert its authority in all Lebanese territory. Much remains to be done, but we are confident in the wisdom and determination of the Lebanese people to ensure that their tragic past is never repeated.

At the same time, it is important for the international community to help address other issues that are used as a means to sustain space for parallel structures of authority to flourish. For this it is essential that all parties concerned abide fully by their commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions, and the processes begun under Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), in particular. The practice of citing actions by other parties as a pretext for not abiding by these commitments only hinders the Government of Lebanon, which is of no benefit to any of the parties.

The truism that all peace is indivisible is most clearly exemplified by the situation in the Middle East. In our interconnected world, we cannot allow the tragedy of the Middle East to continue to fester as it has for decades. An opportunity is at hand for us to collectively arrive at a just, lasting and durable solution to the various interrelated tracks that constitute the Middle East problem. We must seize the moment, in our collective interest, so as to enable the vision of an independent, viable and sovereign State of Palestine, living side-by-side and in peace with Israel, and a

larger Middle East whose constituent nations remain at peace with each other and with the world at large.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): Experience tells us to be cautious about raising expectations with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But we cannot but welcome the fact that the parties seem to be engaged in serious negotiations, after Sharm el-Sheikh.

To move forward, both parties must honour their obligations under the Road Map, and they must refrain from acts that prejudice a comprehensive solution. That means that the continued settlement activity must stop, and the separation barrier in the West Bank must be dismantled. It undermines the prospect of a viable Palestinian State. And the Agreement on Movement and Access must be implemented.

Negotiations would benefit from tangible improvements on the ground: tangible improvements in the lives of Palestinians and tangible increase in the security of the Israelis. Without such sources of hope, we run the risk of eroding popular support on both sides. Expectations are high. If they are not met, we could face political setbacks and continued violence. This must not be allowed to happen.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is crucial. We are faced with a deeply worrying economic and social situation. Most of the population in the Gaza Strip is dependent on food aid from the United Nations. The costs of providing food aid are rising. The amount of humanitarian goods allowed into the Gaza Strip is still not sufficient.

Israeli restrictions have a staggering effect on the prospects for economic activities. We call upon Israel to ease these restrictions on people's movement of goods that they need. The Israelis should really refrain from administering punitive measures against an entire population.

All the more worrisome are the dramatic changes in the world economy. Perhaps more than anywhere else, the Palestinian economy is vulnerable to the impact of the economic crisis. And a further deterioration in the economic and social situation of Palestinians — especially in the Gaza Strip — could further undermine the peace efforts. That is why the international community must stand by its commitments. This is how we can support an end to the conflict and the creation of a Palestinian State.

Norway has contributed \$137 million to the Palestinian territory in 2008. Unmoved by the financial crisis, we have recently pledged to maintain our support at the same level in 2009 and 2010. And we say to other donors: Now is not the time to scale down.

As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, Norway has emphasized the connection between external financial support and political results. At the Committee's meeting in New York this September all parties — Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the donors — confirmed their continued political commitment to building a Palestinian State. In 2008 the Committee succeeded in mobilising \$1.8 billion in support of the Palestinian budget. Palestinian budget support needs for 2009 are estimated at \$1.3 billion.

A peace process requires unity of purpose from both parties. Without the internal Palestinian divide being overcome, it is difficult to see how a peace treaty can be concluded, much less implemented, among all Palestinians. That is why Egypt's role is so important when it ventures to facilitate Palestinian reconciliation and to broker a calm in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel.

We commend the positive role of regional actors in contributing towards a peaceful solution of the conflict. The Arab Peace Initiative holds out a promise. It will require painful concessions on all sides, but the price of peace will be worth every single step on the way.

Mr. Çorman (Turkey): As Turkey aligns itself with the French statement on behalf of the European Union, I shall be brief.

Although we had a turbulent start this year in the Middle East, the ensuing developments proved, once again, the resilience of the region. We now have reasons to look ahead with optimism. The prospect of permanent stability in Lebanon introduced by the Doha Agreement, the deal reached last summer to end hostilities with regard to southern Israel and the Gaza Strip, and the proximity talks between Syria and Israel in Istanbul are all important steps which bode well for the future of the region.

Nevertheless, the challenges remain. The current situation in and around the border of Israel and the Gaza Strip is a source of concern for all of us. Also the settlement activities of Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the continuing construction

of the separation wall, are definitely not contributing to the peace process and are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map.

As we enter a new period in the Middle East, it is imperative that neither party should take any step which might undermine the peace process and prejudice the final status negotiations. Israel's security concerns must be addressed, and the Israelis must address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

At the current stage, our focus should be on the peace process. We have to look into ways of making the best use of the relative calm and the ongoing efforts on different tracks in the region. We should work on creating an even better ground for peace talks on every track, and urge the parties to exercise the utmost restraint. Meanwhile, we appeal to all the leaders of Palestine to join hands in the pursuit of peace.

The Turkish Government continues to contribute to the process of confidence-building and increased interaction between Israelis and Palestinians through several joint projects, as well as addressing the needs of the Palestinian people.

We welcome the landmark developments in Lebanon in the implementation of the Doha Agreement. We sincerely believe that the future has a much brighter era in store for Lebanon. The courage and resilience of the people of Lebanon will further promote and carry forward the recent positive developments. Turkey, as always, remains ready to contribute to the stability, security and prosperity of Lebanon.

We also note with appreciation the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, which is a milestone that will serve not only those two countries, but also the entire region.

Turkey believes in a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Turkey will continue its efforts towards reaching peace in the region, based on a two-State settlement. As we go through a crucial period in the Middle East, there is no alternative but to focus on the political process and carry it forward with determination, while maintaining moderation in the face of challenges.

Mr. Zhang Yesui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): On the first anniversary of the launching of the Annapolis process, the Middle East situation is again at a critical juncture.

Over the past year, since the holding of the Annapolis Conference and the Paris International Conference on assistance to Palestine, there have been positive developments on the question of the Middle East. The Palestinian and Israeli leaders have held multiple rounds of direct talks, and negotiating groups of the two parties have been in close contact. The international community has made unremitting efforts to advance the peace process.

Although the Palestinian-Israeli talks have not achieved the anticipated results, the core issue of the final status has been explored in an in-depth and frank manner. This will help the two sides to continuously narrow the differences between their positions and lay the foundation for the final settlement plan.

We firmly believe that political talks are the only correct approach to the question of the Middle East. In the current circumstances, the Palestinian and Israeli sides must maintain their faith in adhering to peace talks in all conditions. We have noted the statement made at the beginning of this month by the Quartet. We hope that the Palestinian and Israeli sides will, under the new circumstances, maintain mechanisms for talks and negotiations, and strive for a new momentum in the talks.

We expect the Palestinian and Israeli sides to overcome difficulties and interference on the basis of the principle of land for peace and relevant United Nations resolutions, expeditiously achieve substantive results, establish an independent Palestinian State at an early date; and achieve the goal of having the two States — Palestine and Israel — live in peace side by side.

China is deeply concerned at the grave security and humanitarian situation in Palestine and worried about the recent renewed eruption of violent conflict in the Gaza Strip and the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation. We urge Israel to respond actively to the United Nations appeals and expeditiously allow unimpeded access of humanitarian goods to the Gaza Strip.

The continued construction by Israel of settlements on the West Bank is not only in violation of Israel's obligations under international law, but is also not conducive to guaranteeing Israel's own security.

We appeal to the international community to continue to provide all kinds of assistance to Palestine.

Apart from alleviating the humanitarian situation, the international community should also vigorously help Palestine to strengthen its capacity-building and accelerate its economic development.

The talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks are also an important component of the Middle East peace process. Over the past year Syria and Israel have held several rounds of indirect talks under the mediation of Turkey. The situation on the Syrian-Israeli track and the Lebanese-Israeli track remains stable on the whole. We hope that these two tracks will keep to the path of peaceful talks so as to achieve a comprehensive solution of the question of the Middle East.

China has always committed itself to the Middle East peace process. We support and actively participate in all efforts by the international community for the peace, stability and development of the Middle East region. We support an even greater role for the United Nations and the Security Council. China will continue to work with the rest of the international community and play a constructive role for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East still faces major challenges as a result of lack of progress in resolving the major issues facing the region. A just settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Middle East and world problems, will contribute to resolving the region's problems and conflicts.

It is regrettable that this year will end without realization of the legitimate ambitions of the Palestinian people, and of other peoples of the Middle East, to establish the Palestinian people's independent State on their national territory. The political process could lose the momentum generated by the Annapolis Conference as a result of several political developments involving the parties to the peace process. Loss of that momentum could deprive the process of its credibility and would be a setback to efforts to realize a lasting, just and comprehensive peace.

We must maintain the peace process on its track. We must have positive and effective contacts between all the parties. The Israeli side should take confidence-building measures that would improve the humanitarian situation on the ground, such as opening the crossing points, releasing detainees, ending construction of the settlements and settler violence,

reducing restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons, and goods, and humanitarian aid into and within Gaza and giving Palestinian economy a chance to grow.

The desired peace will generate progress and development in the region and enhance the position of the forces of moderation in the face of extremism. It will renew the basis of cooperation between all parties.

Through the decades, Jordan has dealt with the problems of the region on the basis of its conviction that just solutions can be attained by peaceful means in a way that will realize the rights of all, and out of its conviction that military power and unilateral solutions will only exacerbate the suffering of people and threaten regional and international peace and stability.

Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, is continuing its efforts at all levels to mobilize support to push forward the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians and to reach a peace agreement that will mean the establishment of a contiguous, independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the Palestinian lands occupied since 1967. Peace would thus be based on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people — notably the establishment of the Palestinian State on the national territory in consonance with the two-State solution mentioned in the Road Map.

Today we reiterate Jordan's call for the international community to take the historic opportunity afforded by the Arab Peace Initiative to put an end to the struggle and replace it with a lasting, just and comprehensive peace, thus bringing security to the whole region. The initiative is a basis for dealing with all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Targeting and killing innocent civilians is totally rejected. Such acts will only erode the efforts to realize the peace process, as they increase the chances of violence, which leads to more hatred, murder, destruction and extremism. Putting an end to violence and achieving peace is not the responsibility of one party without the other. The international community should deal in a balanced manner with both the Israeli and Palestinian parties to realize the prerequisite of this stage.

At a time when all the parties concerned seek to see an end to the conflict, Israel continues its illegitimate practices, confiscating land and changing

the de facto situation through settlements, building the separation wall and changing the situation in Jerusalem. All those acts constitute a flagrant violation of international law, the principles of international legitimacy and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Jordan rejects these new Israeli measures, which seek to create a new de facto situation, particularly in Jerusalem.

The world is witnessing in silence the suffering and the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip as a result of the collective punishment imposed on the Palestinians, including women, children and the elderly. Gaza is experiencing a sharp deterioration in the standard of supplies of basic goods and medicines, as well as a considerable increase in unemployment. The humanitarian situation is unacceptable. Our brothers face shortages of basic medical supplies and a deterioration of health services.

The Palestinian people are living in tragic economic and social conditions that are contrary to the values of justice and to human conscience. We call on the international community, which has legal and human obligations, to support our brothers in Palestine, provide them with urgently needed humanitarian assistance and put an end to their suffering. Israel should open the crossing points to Gaza and allow humanitarian assistance to reach Gaza immediately, or the continuation of the situation will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.

Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty the King, is making every possible effort and making contacts in the international community to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and provide assistance that will improve their living conditions and avert any further deterioration of those conditions. The Hashemite Jordanian Aid and Relief Agency, under directions from His Majesty the King, has provided 242 caravans of humanitarian and medical assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Jordan also emphasizes the need for the Palestinian people to be united at this crucial and difficult time, in order to realize their aspirations to establish their independent State. In this respect, Jordan fully supports Palestinian legitimacy, as represented by the Palestinian National Authority and its President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. The international community is therefore urged to support Mr. Abbas and

the Palestinian leadership in their efforts to establish a democratic political system, to enhance the national Palestinian institutions and to build accountable institutions, including security institutions, that are transparent.

The international community should support the reform and development plans drawn up by the Authority and provide the necessary finance in order to reintegrate and develop the Palestinian economy and rebuild its institutions. The state of the Palestinian economy is a very important condition for peace. The Palestinian people need assistance to rebuild it. The major challenge is to create an economy that will provide new job opportunities and attract new investment. Humanitarian and development assistance cannot bring tangible results without the closures and the restrictions on the movement of the Palestinians being eased so that the economy will be revitalized and the delivery of aid and assistance will be more efficient.

Jordan supports all efforts to realize a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, based on the decisions of the Arab summits, the Madrid terms of reference and relevant international resolutions, and to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks.

In conclusion, Jordan reiterates its support for Lebanon and respect for its sovereignty and stability. Our support for this sister country and President Michel Suleiman, will continue, in order to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of his land.

Mr. Hill (Australia): I am pleased to speak today on this important topic and bring an Australian perspective to the situation in the Middle East.

My Foreign Minister, Mr. Stephen Smith, recently met with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to reaffirm the Australian Government's strong commitment to the Middle East peace process. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, he heard from both sides of their strong commitment to peace and to continuing the negotiations begun at Annapolis last year.

Just as in 1947, when Australia supported the proposed establishment of separate Jewish and Palestinian States, Australia is committed today to a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Australia wants Israel's people to be able to enjoy the fruits of a normal, peaceful existence, within a Middle East that recognizes its right to live in peace within

secure and internationally recognised boundaries. And we want to see Palestinians realize their right to an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State and to also live in peace and security.

At last year's Annapolis Conference, the Israeli and Palestinian leadership commenced upon a path of negotiations which holds the promise of a just and lasting settlement. Australia recognizes and applauds the parties' resolve to work cooperatively in a meaningful and substantive dialogue over the last year. We particularly welcome the commitment the parties gave to the Quartet on 9 November to vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues.

Australia strongly supports the efforts of the United Nations to promote Middle East peace. We commend the Quartet for the assistance it has given the parties in their bilateral negotiations. But, as the Quartet reaffirmed in Sharm el-Sheikh, on 9 November, it is incumbent on all of us to help the parties to the dispute to seize the opportunities now at hand.

Australia wants to play its part. In December last year, Australia announced that we would double our aid programme to the Palestinian territories for 2008. An important, and long-standing, part of this contribution assists the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Australia is proud to be on the advisory board of UNRWA, and we commend the valuable humanitarian work it undertakes every day in support of Palestinian people.

We also recognize that a viable Palestinian State will require strong and effective institutions. We commend the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its political and security institutions, and remain committed to supporting them. During his visit, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs announced a further contribution of \$7.5 million to the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan.

Australia will also continue to provide practical support to the peace process, including through our long-standing contribution to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and other peacekeeping operations in the region.

For our part, Australia welcomes the renewed commitment of the parties outlined in Sharm el-Sheikh to implement their respective obligations under the Road Map for peace. By fulfilling these obligations, both sides can create the conditions needed to achieve real progress.

The Palestinian leadership must fight terrorism and foster an atmosphere of tolerance to bring Palestinian violence against Israel to an end. Equally, Israel should build confidence by ceasing settlement activity. Both sides must respect human rights and international law, and do everything possible to protect civilians.

Australia recognizes the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, first proposed by His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, as a basis for discussions on a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbours. We welcome the renewed interest in this initiative. We commend the positive role Egypt has played, including in brokering a ceasefire in Gaza. We also welcome Turkey's efforts in facilitating indirect talks between Israel and Syria — an important element of a broader peace.

Those efforts stand in stark contrast to what is done by those who continue to undermine the peace process through terrorism, extremism and intolerance. Hamas, in its violent takeover of Gaza, its rejection of Quartet principles and its refusal to recognize Israel, does nothing to assist the Palestinian people. We call on Hamas to release Gilad Shalit unconditionally without further delay.

In relation to Lebanon, Australia welcomed the Doha Agreement in May, which represented a commitment by Lebanese leaders to address political differences through dialogue, not violence. The election of President Suleiman was an important, positive step, as was the adoption of a law paving the way for elections in 2009. Australia will remain firm in its support for the sovereignty, political independence and unity of the Lebanese State. We reiterate our call for Hezbollah to reject terrorism and disarm, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1559 (2004).

Australia also welcomes Syria's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon, and to undertake indirect peace talks with Israel. But Australia remains concerned by information indicating undeclared nuclear activities in Syria, and urges Syria

to provide maximum cooperation and transparency to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to allow it to complete its assessment.

Sadly, from Iran we are not seeing any positive signals. It, too, is important in achieving a stable and peaceful Middle East. But all the evidence is that Iran is being seriously unhelpful to this goal, as demonstrated by the repeated, and appalling, anti-Semitic rhetoric of its President, including at the General Assembly on 23 September; the assisting of terrorist organizations directly targeting Israel; and Iran's failure to comply fully with its IAEA obligations and Security Council resolutions. We urge a change of direction from Iran, to stop being unhelpful to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.

Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have asked the international community to support their efforts, by promoting an environment conducive to peace, non-violence and the two-State solution. The Quartet has called on all of us to provide diplomatic and political support, and assist in building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State. Australia will answer those calls.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): Japan welcomes this opportunity to address the General Assembly on the situation in the Middle East.

While fully aware of the challenges that the Middle East peace process faces, we regard the commitment expressed by the parties through their recent briefings to the Quartet as an encouraging sign. We commend President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert for their tireless efforts to bring peace to the region. Japan views the continuation of direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians as essential for paving the way towards lasting peace. We stand ready, with the international community, to support the process.

Nevertheless, we should not turn a blind eye to the harsh conditions on the ground. We are deeply concerned at the staggering humanitarian situation, especially in Gaza. Settlement activities in the West Bank have not been frozen as we had hoped. The restrictions on movement are having an adverse impact on the livelihood of ordinary people, which, in turn, is generating a deep sense of frustration and even resentment towards the peace process among many Palestinians. Acts of violence will be no solution. There is nothing more important than securing a safe

environment for both Israeli and Palestinian people in which they can live free from fear.

We need to maintain our spirit of hope and mutual respect. In this regard, we witnessed a historic moment in the General Assembly this November. Several Heads of State and Government gathered at the high-level meeting on the culture of peace, initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. During the meeting, we heard repeated calls to foster peace through dialogue and mutual understanding. We sincerely hope that, as President Peres of Israel said, those calls will become the prevailing voice of the whole region, of all people.

A comprehensive agreement addressing all core issues, such as the permanent borders, Jerusalem, security arrangements, refugees and water resources, is not only an end in itself, but also the beginning of stability and prosperity in the Middle East. We are well aware, however, that it will require strong political will, strengthened mutual trust and sustained support from the international community along the way.

In that regard, we commend the commitment by the parties to continue their efforts to bring an end to the conflict by achieving the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. At the same time, we recognize the importance of the Arab peace initiatives, which should contribute to confidence-building in the region. We also support the Palestinian national dialogue, which Egypt has made efforts to promote.

We are firmly convinced that unification is indispensable in order for the Palestinian people to have the decent life they deserve. At the same time, we appreciate the efforts for the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under the auspices of Turkey, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. We believe that the positive progress shown on all of these fronts will culminate in comprehensive peace in the region.

It is essential for the Palestinian people to build a viable and sustainable economy, as is necessary for any other people. To help achieve this goal, Japan has promoted the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative, which is to build an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley, thereby providing job opportunities and facilitating export to the surrounding areas. The project rests on a partnership between the public and

private sectors of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Japan and other interested parties.

We are continuing to implement our commitment of \$150 million made at the Paris Conference last December. As announced at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in September, Japan has provided an additional \$10 million in the form of non-project grant aid to ease the budgetary burden of the Palestinian Authority. Japan's contributions since the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in 1993 have so far amounted to approximately \$1 billion.

In addition, Japan hosted the Fourth Conference for Confidence-Building between the Israelis and the Palestinians in October, with the participation of the Israeli delegation, headed by Mr. Meir Sheetrit, Interior Minister of Israel, and the Palestine delegation, headed by Mr. Sa'eb Erekat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The objective of the conference is to deepen understanding and build mutual confidence between the two sides towards the achievement of a two-State solution, based on peaceful coexistence between Israel and an independent Palestinian State. We hope that our efforts will increase the momentum for the long-awaited peace in the region.

In closing, I should stress the importance of maintaining the peace process. Japan fully expects that the leaders of both Israel and Palestine will continue the negotiations with unchanged determination. We in the international community will demonstrate our solidarity by helping to plant the seeds of hope and peace in the region.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 15.

Programme of work

The Acting President: At the request of the sponsors, action on draft resolutions A/63/L.36 and A/63/L.37, under agenda item 15, as well as on draft resolutions A/63/L.32 to A/63/L.35, under agenda item 16, will be taken at 10 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, 26 November.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.