



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 23 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” convened on Monday, 21 December 2020.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the annexed briefing and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Jerry Matthews **Matjila**  
President of the Security Council



**Annex I****Statement by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Nickolay Mladenov**

I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the sixteenth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2020/1234). The written report, which members have already received, covers the period from 21 September to 10 December 2020. I will begin by providing an update on developments since the submission of the report to the Security Council.

On 15 December, the Palestinian Prime Minister and the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory launched the 2021 humanitarian response plan, which includes an appeal for \$417 million to help 1.8 million vulnerable people over the coming year. The latest humanitarian needs assessment found that 2.5 million Palestinians — some 47 per cent of the population — currently need aid.

Settlement-related developments continued after the submission of the written report. On 13 December, the Israeli authorities announced a tender for 290 housing units in the settlement of Gilo, in East Jerusalem. On 16 December, in a preliminary vote, the Israeli Knesset advanced a bill that sets a two-year time frame for the legalization of 65 outposts and mandates that they should be treated as authorized settlements in the interim, with their residents receiving all municipal services.

Also since the submission of the written report, violent incidents continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

On 11 December, a Palestinian man from Nablus, who was deaf and mute, reportedly died from complications resulting from an injury sustained from live ammunition. The man was shot by private security guards on 17 August at the Qalandia checkpoint, north of Jerusalem. Israeli security forces previously stated that an investigation was opened into the incident.

On 13 December, in the context of clashes, the Israeli security forces injured two Palestinians, including a 15-year-old, in Al-Shawabka, north of Tulkarm. The boy was reportedly shot in the knee with live ammunition.

On 14 December, Israeli forces at the Gaza perimeter fence fired one shell that landed near the Al-Bureij refugee camp, causing damage to a house. Israel Defense Forces said that the incident was accidental and have also opened an investigation.

I would like to focus on some observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

I remain deeply troubled by continued Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Over the past year, Israeli authorities advanced controversial settlement plans that had been frozen for years. The total number of units advanced in 2020 are on a par with 2019 numbers, despite an eight-month hiatus this year. Some 50 per cent of them are deep in the West Bank, in areas crucial for the contiguity and viability of a future Palestinian State.

In the strategic location of E-1, plans for some 3,500 units were advanced after an eight-year delay. If implemented, the E-1 plan would sever the connection between the northern and southern West Bank. Similarly, a tender was issued for some 1,200 units establishing a new settlement in Givat Hamatos that threatens to further disconnect East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and the southern West Bank. If either project moves forward, it would significantly undermine the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State as part of a negotiated two-State solution.

Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. Settlements entrench Israel's occupation and undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution. The advancement of all settlement activity must cease immediately.

The continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, notably humanitarian projects and schools, is deeply concerning. I call on Israeli authorities to end the demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs.

The continuing violence, attacks against civilians and incitement to violence are unacceptable. All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable. I am appalled that children continue to be victims — with a particularly troubling series of incidents over the past month in the occupied Palestinian territory. Children should not be the target of violence or be put in harm's way.

I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Israeli and Palestinian authorities must carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and others is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Palestinian militants must cease that practice immediately.

I am deeply concerned at the continued settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I call on Israeli authorities to abide by international law, protect Palestinians from violence by Israeli settlers and ensure that farmers can access their land freely and safely.

Regrettably, the fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israeli soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to release them immediately. I also remain concerned at the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call for the return of withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

Human rights defenders and peace activists continue to be subject to pressure and arrest; authorities have an obligation to respect the freedoms of expression, association and assembly and to facilitate and promote an enabling environment for civil society to function in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Since Gaza courts continue to hand down death sentences, in violation of Palestinian law and the State of Palestine's international obligations, I call upon Hamas in Gaza to impose an immediate moratorium on executions and cease the use of military tribunals to try civilians.

The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a serious concern. With support from partners and a loan from the Central Emergency Respond Fund, a disruption of vital services was averted last month. Unfortunately, despite that support, there is a funding gap of \$88 million in December. That includes some \$22 million to pay salaries to nearly 30,000 front-line education, health, social and other workers directly assisting Palestine refugees. The income forecast for UNRWA in January 2021 is worse and may well require more drastic measures to prevent a financial collapse of the Agency in the months to come. The Agency is not only a

lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees and fully engaged in the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) but is also critical for regional stability. Sufficient funding is essential for the Agency's continuity, and I renew my appeal for support.

The situation in Gaza remains fragile amid the immense suffering of the people. The risk of a major escalation remains. While taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza. Only by fully lifting the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis.

It is deeply regrettable that agreement has not been reached on the holding of long-overdue Palestinian presidential and legislative elections. I continue to encourage the parties to overcome outstanding differences, in line with Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

With regard to the wider peace process, I join the Secretary-General in urging Israelis, Palestinians, States of the region and the broader international community to take practical steps to enable the parties to re-engage. Such steps must also be accompanied by concrete actions to restore a legitimate political horizon to end the conflict. The Middle East Quartet — alongside Arab partners — and Israeli and Palestinian leaders must work together to return to the path of meaningful negotiations.

I hope that recent developments will encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to restart meaningful negotiations, with the support of the international community, and will create opportunities for regional cooperation. As we have seen in statements from around the world, the commitment to the two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, continues to be affirmed by broad regional and international consensus.

I would like to highlight some progress and opportunities following the Palestinian Authority's decision to restart civilian and security coordination with Israel, which I briefed the Security Council on last month (see S/2020/1128).

The Palestinian Government has received some \$900 million in back-revenues vital to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorating financial situation.

In meetings with leaders on both sides, I have strongly encouraged them to seize this moment to begin a process of updating their economic and administrative relationship. I am encouraged by recent technical-level exchanges between the Ministries of Health and encourage high-level discussions between the Ministries of Finance. An agreement on relevant reforms would not only have notable humanitarian, economic and development benefits but also represent an important first step on the path back to meaningful negotiations.

I again encourage Israel to maintain its commitment to backstopping the Palestinian Authority's finances up to a minimum monthly transfer of revenues for the duration of the emergency and to take concrete steps, such as granting permits to Palestinians from Gaza to work in Israel and the West Bank when adequate health precautions are in place. It remains vital to also ease dual-use restrictions for imports into the Gaza Strip and grant construction permits in Area C of the occupied West Bank.

Similarly, I reiterate my call on the Palestinian Authority to take important steps towards mitigating future risk to its banking sector and revenues by aligning its expenditures with the recommendations made by the World Bank and the United Nations Special Coordinator's Office (UNSCO) in June, including for the introduction of a single basic income support scheme. I note President Abbas' decision to form a committee on that issue. Reforming the system of payments to

Palestinian prisoners, their families and the families of those killed or injured in the context of attacks would not only mitigate risk but could remove a significant obstacle to some donor support and talks on more substantive steps to modernize the economic relationship. All sides can take immediate steps to facilitate the movement of goods in and out of Gaza and to allow trade to increase between the Gaza Strip, Israel and the West Bank.

The support of the international community is vital. In addition, it is important to ensure support to the inter-agency humanitarian response plan and the socioeconomic response plans of the United Nations country team and the Palestinian Authority. I have also encouraged donors to support a few critical initiatives that could be implemented immediately and would create some 20,000 jobs in Gaza for at least 12 months; accelerate critical infrastructure initiatives in the water, sanitation, energy and health sectors; and support small and medium-sized enterprises.

Daily violence has continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures continue unabated, raising tensions on the ground and further undermining the viability of a two-State solution. Intra-Palestinian division remains unresolved. The humanitarian, economic and health crisis in Gaza has grown increasingly dire amid debilitating closures, political division and militant activity.

In that context, we must persevere in our efforts to prevent violent escalation and encourage leaders on both sides to take steps towards enabling a return to negotiations, not a re-establishment of the conflict. We remain guided by the clear and unwavering United Nations position that only a two-State solution that realizes the legitimate national aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements, can lead to sustainable peace between the two peoples.

In addition, over this past year, the pandemic has upended life around the globe and has exacerbated many of those negative trends, bringing crucial economic and humanitarian systems to the brink of collapse. I wish to thank and commend the front-line health workers on the ground and my United Nations colleagues for their tireless commitment to helping the Palestinian people weather yet another storm. While the cost in lives and livelihoods has already been too great, I am certain that, without the swift and robust interventions by health authorities, civil society organizations, donors and United Nations agencies, the crisis would have proved deeper still.

I remain hopeful that next year we will not only turn the corner on the pandemic but, by facing that challenge together, find renewed confidence in the path towards a sustainable solution to the conflict.

As this will be my last briefing to the Council, I would like to share a few parting thoughts.

Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs have lived with conflict for too long. The painful reality of their struggle has affected every single family for generations. Loss and displacement are part of the personal history of every single household. Palestinians have been upended from their homes and forced to seek refuge across the region. Jews have been upended from across the region and forced to seek refuge in Israel. The conflict is not only a conflict over land, since both peoples have the right to call Israel and Palestine their home. It is not only a conflict over history — personal and collective — but also a conflict over the very right of two nations to co-exist.

In 1994, the leaders of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed on something that has rarely been done in the troubled history of the Middle East — they agreed to end the conflict not through war, not by declaring one side a winner and the other side a loser, but through peaceful negotiations. That was clearly not an easy decision but one that faced opposition from all sides. Yet it was a decision that was so bold, so visionary and so fragile that the international community immediately came together to protect it, nurture it and help the leaders advance it.

Sadly, today that vision remains unachieved. It is a vision that has been marred by intifadas, continuing occupation and a rapidly diminishing will to reach an agreement that is just and sustainable. Over the course of the past five years, I met almost no Palestinian who did not believe that negotiations are only a facade for the loss of more land. Neither did I meet an Israeli who did not believe that every round of negotiations will lead to more violence and terror.

Security Council members know the realities of the conflict only too well. Our monthly Council briefings serve as a testament to the situation on the ground. As I depart this Office, I remain firmly convinced that the world cannot leave the situation unattended. Over the years, the Security Council has adopted a series of resolutions that consider key aspects of how the conflict can be resolved. Bilateral agreements were signed and ratified. The Middle East Quartet was created. In the past two years, the United States put forward a vision, albeit different from the broad consensus in the Council. Despite the differences, no one in the international community has questioned the fundamental premise that any resolution of the conflict must be based on two States, with the appropriate security and economic arrangements, achieved through direct negotiations and facilitated by the international community.

Despite all our collective efforts, the only way forward out of the one-State reality that we increasingly face on the ground is through engagement between the parties, not through violence. Perhaps today is not the time for big international initiatives but the time for steps — sometimes small, sometimes bold — that protect that goal of two States, living side by side in peace and security, and create the conditions for agreement.

Perhaps today is not the time for grandstanding or symbolic victories. Perhaps today is the time to admit that both Israelis and Palestinians must look inward and see what they can do, both in coordination and independently of one another, to protect the goal of sustainable peace. In 2016, the United Nations, together with its partners in the Middle East Quartet, produced a joint report (S/2016/595, annex) on what some of those steps might be. I encourage Council members to look at that report again, as its recommendations remain valid.

Perhaps today is the time to admit that there are real opportunities for agreement, which flow from the fact that we face a global COVID-19 pandemic and we all need to work together to protect our societies from radicalization, religious extremism and economic implosion and to build on the new opportunities created in the region by the Abraham accords.

It is not going to be easy. In fact, it will be extremely difficult, painstaking work to stitch back together what is necessary to allow the leaders on both sides to engage in a meaningful process. Yet, for all the goodwill in the world on which the Palestinian and Israeli peoples can count, rekindling the hope that the conflict can be resolved through peaceful negotiation cannot be imposed from outside. It must come from within, from both peoples and from their freely elected leaders.

In the absence of meaningful negotiations, I have worked to uphold the international consensus that the goal is a two-State solution. I have warned of the dangers of eroding the status quo, supported intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts

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and, above all, focused on preventive diplomacy. Together with Egypt and with the critical support of Qatar and others in the international community, the United Nations has played a pivotal role in preventing another devastating war in Gaza. I have spoken out against injustices. I have condemned terror.

I firmly believe that the goal of a just and lasting peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples remains achievable through negotiations that can be mediated by the Middle East Quartet and critical Arab partners.

I would like to thank Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, their Governments, their civil servants and all interlocutors in Israel and Palestine for their open engagement with the United Nations. On many occasions we have certainly not seen eye to eye. However, their openness and willingness to engage have helped to put the United Nations in a unique position to mediate and talk to all parties to the conflict.

I want to thank the Security Council for its relentless engagement and support for our work, and the Secretary-General and the services of the Secretariat for their steadfast guidance.

Finally, I want to thank my colleagues at UNSCO for their outstanding professionalism and friendship. UNSCO is in an excellent position to deal with the challenges of the future and to use the opportunities presented to advance the goal of a just and lasting peace on the basis of two States, in line with United Nations resolutions. In January, my successor, Tor Wennesland, should take over this mission. He is one of the most capable diplomats with whom I have ever worked. I wish him every success in the years ahead and I hope that the Council will extend its full support to him, as it has done to me.

**Annex II****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Karen Van Vlierberge**

[Original: French]

I thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank him for his tireless efforts in pursuit of a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

Throughout its term on the Security Council, Belgium's position has always been guided by respect for international law, including with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian question. We remain firmly convinced that respect for international law is the only way to achieve the aspirations of both parties in a just and lasting manner. The legal framework for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian question is well known and has been endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the international community. Unfortunately, the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234) demonstrates that it is not the lack of a legal framework but the lack of implementation that is hindering the resolution of this conflict. We therefore call on all parties to comply with their obligations under international law, including resolution 2334 (2016), and recall in particular Israel's obligations as the occupying Power.

We also call on the Palestinian political parties to work in good faith for the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single legitimate and democratic authority. We strongly encourage the Palestinian Authority to engage in a democratic and inclusive electoral process based on the rule of law.

Despite the outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic last year, the Israeli settlement policy has continued not only through settlement expansion but also through demolitions and evictions, as we just heard from the Special Coordinator. That policy is illegal under international law, including resolution 2334 (2016). Settlements are likely to undermine any prospect and viability of a future Palestinian State.

In that regard, I would like to reiterate Belgium's concerns over any plans that threaten the territorial continuity of a future Palestinian State and the future of Jerusalem as a shared capital. In keeping with the consistent position of the European Union, we will not recognize any changes to the lines of 4 June 1967, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties in negotiations.

In that context, we also recall the obligation of all States under international law to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Otherwise, the illegal settlement policy will be further strengthened.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for immediate measures to be taken to prevent all acts of violence against civilians. However, that obligation is not being met. Human rights defenders, peace activists and journalists, in particular, continue to suffer violations of their civil and political rights and even arbitrary arrests.

Today I would also like to particularly focus on violence against children. In recent weeks, we have noted with concern the use of several rounds of live ammunition against Palestinian children, even causing the death of one of them. We call for thorough and transparent investigations. It is also essential that the victims and their families be well informed about the progress of the investigations and their findings. Children must never be the target of violence, and neither should they be exposed to the risk of violence or encouraged to participate in it. In all such cases, the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Belgium will continue to support the mandate and the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The Agency's work is of vital importance to its beneficiaries and is also crucial to maintaining stability in the region.

We welcomed the normalization agreements concluded in recent weeks, as they provide opportunities to foster peace and stability in the region. We encourage all relevant actors to seize this opportunity to work actively towards a just, viable and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only way forward is the resumption of a dialogue in good faith between the parties, with the active support of the international community. For its part, Belgium will continue to be a partner for peace to both Israelis and Palestinians.

**Annex III****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: English and Chinese]

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I would also like to use this opportunity to thank the Special Coordinator for his work over the past five years, especially in pursuit of a solution to the Palestinian question. I also wish him all the best in his new post.

Four years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), there has been no noticeable progress in its implementation. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate and the Middle East peace process is stalled. That situation is deeply worrisome.

The relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the two-State solution, distilled from generations of wisdom and painstaking work, must be observed and implemented. China notes with concern the continuation and significant expansion of settlement activities. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234), over the past four years, plans for more than 28,000 housing units have been approved, tenders have been announced for 12,000 units and the construction of approximately 6,000 units has started. We call on all the parties concerned to abide by United Nations resolutions, settle the final delineation of the Palestinian-Israeli borders through peaceful negotiations, refrain from unilateral actions that may exacerbate tensions, abandon the annexation plans and cease settlement activities.

The past few months have seen increased demolitions of Palestinian houses and an escalation of violence against civilians. With their homes gone, we have seen hundreds of children forced into displacement. We urge the relevant authorities to immediately lift the blockade on Gaza, cease demolishing Palestinian houses and destroying Palestinian property and stop acts of violence against civilians.

As close neighbours that cannot physically move away from each other, Palestine and Israel must adhere to the strategic option of peace talks and relaunch dialogue on an equal footing without delay. We welcome the initiative of President Abbas to convene an international peace conference early next year. We commend the two parties for restarting civil and security cooperation and resuming the transfer of tax revenues.

At the international level, we must all remain impartial and objective, working in good faith to advance the Middle East peace process. Any solution to the Palestinian question must take into account the voices of the countries of the region, especially Palestine, accommodate the concerns of all parties and not be imposed on any party.

Given the current context, the international community must place the economic and humanitarian impacts of the coronavirus disease on Palestine high on its agenda. We applaud the tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine. General Assembly resolution 75/94, on the operations of UNRWA, was adopted with an overwhelming majority this month — an eloquent testimony to international recognition of the Agency's work. At a time when UNRWA is under tremendous financial pressure, the world needs to honour its commitments and actively provide financial contributions to help the Agency overcome the current difficulties.

Since the start of this year, China has provided numerous shipments of personal protective equipment and other anti-epidemic supplies to Palestine, sent a team of health experts and made significant donations to UNRWA. Recently, anti-epidemic supplies were provided by the Chinese Government to UNRWA-affiliated health institutions, and health kits were provided through UNRWA to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Earlier this month, the United Nations commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. For the eighth consecutive year, President Xi Jinping sent a message to the General Assembly on the annual observance, fully demonstrating China's firm commitment to, and support for, the just cause of the Palestinian people and its sincere wish for peaceful development in the Middle East. China is ready to continue working with the international community in its unwavering effort to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question at an early date.

**Annex IV****Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive update on the situation on the ground in the light of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234).

At the outset, we reaffirm that respect for human rights, international law, the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations continue to be the main guidelines of the Dominican Republic in addressing the issue before us today. Like everyone here, we call for the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution that will address the legitimate concerns of both parties to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We therefore reaffirm our full support for a two-State solution, as set out in the various United Nations resolutions.

We note with dismay the continued expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, referred to in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234), with the advancement, approval or tendering of more than 28,000 units since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). We also reiterate that any movement towards annexation in the occupied Palestinian territory not only contravenes international law but also has serious implications for the security and stability of, and a future negotiated peace between, the two countries.

Today we wish to refer to a pressing situation that requires our full attention and was extensively addressed by the Secretary-General in his report. For a long time, violations of children's rights have been part of our discussions. However, the current pandemic, which has clearly worsened the overall situation, has exacerbated the already difficult circumstances in which the children of Gaza live, with difficulties in accessing essential services, including limited access to health, water and electricity. Palestinian children's access to education is particularly hampered. Schools continue to be demolished and students are harassed, subjected to the indiscriminate use of force or simply caught in the middle of fighting on their way to and from school. Children need stability and the ability to live without fear of war, arrest, dispossession or homelessness. Every child has the right to childhood and to be protected from all forms of violence. We urge all parties to fully respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all children and to refrain from using violence against them, in accordance with international law.

We welcome the announcements of the readiness of the Palestinian Authority and Israel to restore coordination of public security and resume the receipt of tax revenues. That openness, together with the current momentum presented by the normalization agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, should be used to promote and strengthen direct dialogue between the parties — a genuine dialogue that addresses the aspirations and concerns of both parties — with a view to building a viable peace for the entire Middle East region.

Finally, it is the Dominican Republic's most sincere aspiration that this forthcoming period, which is already beginning to show signs of real rapprochement between the Arab world and Israel, should be the gateway for Palestinians and Israelis to resume dialogue and, on the basis of justice and mutual respect, build a future free of war, confrontation, violence, terror and mutual hatred between their peoples, who should be able to live side by side in peace and security.

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**Annex V****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I would also like to express my appreciation for his efforts and dedication during his term in office. I wish him every success in his new and challenging job.

We reiterate our call to the Israelis and the Palestinians to take steps towards solving the conflict and to re-engage in meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues. We urge both sides to engage with the members of the Middle East Quartet and other regional players in that regard.

We believe that the normalization of relations between Israel and certain Arab States is a significant step, and we hope that development will also give impetus to reviving the Middle East peace process with the aim of achieving a two-State solution. The decision by the Palestinian Authority to resume civilian and security coordination with Israel is most welcome and will hopefully also improve prospects for resuming peace negotiations.

Regarding the situation on the ground, we call on all parties to refrain from any unilateral steps that undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We call on Israel to halt the continued settlement expansion and demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem and in sensitive areas such as Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and Area E-1. We also call upon all States to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

We repeat our call for preventing all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, incitement and provocation. We condemn the continued firing of rockets from Gaza towards Israel and any other form of violence targeting civilian populations.

We encourage the Palestinian factions to commit to the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process and reach an agreement on holding presidential and legislative elections. We also share the concern mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234) about the continued arrest of human rights defenders and peace activists by all parties. We remind the parties of their obligation to respect the freedom of expression and assembly.

Finally, I would also like to reiterate the important role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays in terms of stability for the region. We also acknowledge the Agency's efforts aimed at mitigating the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on Palestinian refugees. Estonia continues to support the work of UNRWA financially and urges all other countries to do the same.

**Annex VI****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nathalie Broadhurst Estival**

[Original: English and French]

I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing and extend our thanks to him for his tireless work over the past five years as Special Coordinator, as well as our warm congratulations on his new position.

Almost four years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), France regrets that the Security Council's call to reverse the negative trends on the ground has not been heeded and the two-State solution is more in danger than ever.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1234) is unequivocal: over the past four years Israel has advanced or approved 28,000 housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and has issued tenders for another 12,000 units. France regularly condemns Israeli decisions on settlement activity, which as they stand only increase the risk of the de facto annexation of Palestinian territories. In that regard, my country has condemned the recent announcements with respect to Givat Hamatos. Together with our European partners, we called upon Israel to reverse that decision and all other unilateral measures that undermine the viability of a future Palestinian State. I reiterate that urgent call today.

We are also very concerned at the sharp increase in demolitions and the seizure of Palestinian structures, some of which have been funded by international donors, including France and the European Union. France urges Israel to effectively implement the freeze on demolitions in the context of the pandemic and, when necessary, to compensate those affected. France also reminds Israel of its legal obligations as an occupying Power under the Geneva Conventions.

France will not recognize any changes to the 1967 lines apart from those agreed between the parties. It also recalls the obligation for all States, in their relevant dealings and exchanges, to distinguish between the territory of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. That distinction must be made in particular in bilateral agreements and in all trade — for example, through the differentiated labelling of products from the West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements.

The continuation of settlement activities at an accelerated pace threatens the two-State solution more than ever, which is why it is more urgent than ever today to relaunch a political process. The parameters of the settlement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are well known and are constantly recalled in the Security Council: two States, living in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, both with Jerusalem as their capital. Those parameters have been defined in order to bring about a fair and lasting peace in the region. They guarantee Israel's security and respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians, in accordance with international law. It is our responsibility to work together to make them a reality.

To that end, we must first work to restore trust between the parties. Accordingly, France welcomes the resumption of cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, in particular through the resumption of the payment of tax clearances to the Palestinian Authority, following the Israeli authorities' commitment to respecting the adopted bilateral agreements. We call on the parties to go further, to work together to implement the recommendations of the Special Coordinator referred to in his socioeconomic report of 10 November. In particular, it is urgent that Israel ease the restrictions in the Gaza Strip in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Finally, there is an urgent need to strengthen the cohesion of Palestinian governance. That will require the organization of long-overdue elections. In that regard, we regret the absence to date of an agreement between the Palestinian factions.

It is more necessary than ever that everyone act responsibly and demonstrate political courage. France will continue to work with its German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners to recreate a climate conducive to dialogue between the parties. It will spare no effort to promote the resumption of a credible political process, in consultation with all the stakeholders concerned, and will continue to give its full support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

## Annex VII

### **Statement by the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Christoph Heusgen**

Let me start by thanking Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. As always, he was very clear. I thank him for his tireless efforts. I carefully listened to his final remarks. It is very good that he continues to have the vision of 1994 as his point of reference.

I do not have much to add to what I have said over the last two years. Things have not become any better. Germany has a principled position. As members of the Security Council know, we defend the rules-based international order. Conflicts should be resolved politically and based on international law, including resolutions adopted by the Security Council. From our perspective, resolutions are not a menu à la carte. One cannot pick and choose and forget about the last parameter set forth in resolution 2334 (2016), or resolution 478 (1980) with regard to Jerusalem or resolution 497 (1981) with regard to the Golan Heights. We believe that the implementation of the landmark resolution 2334 (2016) remains the only viable way forward.

With regard to the implementation of that resolution, we continue to be deeply concerned by the negative trends on the ground, which are increasingly threatening the two-State solution: annexation plans, settlement expansion, demolitions, seizures, evictions, plans to retroactively legalize illegal settlement outposts or to take over private Palestinian land by declaring it “State land”. We are also deeply concerned about rockets that are fired into Israel, violence, incitement and the absence of a solution for Gaza. We condemn all attacks against Israel by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups.

Over the past four years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), plans for more than 28,000 settlement units have been advanced or approved in Area C and East Jerusalem. Tenders have been announced for some 12,000 units and the construction of more than 6,000 new units began in Area C. That leads me to a question for the Special Coordinator. Resolution 2334 (2016) already warned about “entrenching a one-State reality”. Considering that Israeli settlement activities, including in sensitive areas around East Jerusalem, such as Givat Hamatos, Har Homa and Area E-1, effectively prevent a contiguous Palestinian State, does Mr. Mladenov still believe in a two-State solution? Is his thinking closer to John Kerry’s when he was Secretary of State and was very frustrated at those kinds of developments?

We have followed very closely the Israeli-Arab rapprochement. Kelly Craft, the United States representative, just outlined how many countries are now recognizing Israel, which is a most welcome development.

While preparing for this meeting, I picked up a small but significant story in *The Economist* dated 12 December about an Israeli football club, Beitar Jerusalem. According to the article, Beitar Jerusalem is the most racist club in Israel. When Beitar Jerusalem signed two Muslim players in 2013, fans burned down the club offices. Just a few weeks ago, the cousin of the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates purchased, with the blessing of an Israeli rabbi, a 50 per cent interest in Beitar Jerusalem. I find that to be a spectacular Israeli-Arab accomplishment.

There are other spectacular examples of cooperation. As Council members may recall, in April 2019, when Germany held the Council presidency, we invited the Israeli-Palestinian non-governmental organization EcoPeace Middle East to brief the Council on peacebuilding efforts through cooperation in the specific area of water conservation (see S/PV.8517). Having a non-governmental organization represented

by an Israeli, a Palestinian and a Jordanian was one of the highlights of my time in the Security Council.

We will continue our joint efforts with our European and Arab partners, France, Egypt and Jordan in facilitating a path towards credible dialogue and serious, meaningful and effective negotiations about all final-status issues and on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters. We support the efforts of the Middle East Quartet and explicitly wish to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his active engagement in exploring and consulting with all relevant actors on the best path forward, including an international conference or any other multilateral format to enable the parties to resume meaningful dialogue and negotiations. I thank him for a job really well done.

Finally, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a major provider of stability in the region. Germany has therefore contributed \$200 million in 2020 to the Agency. We call on other countries, in particular those from the Gulf, to provide more financial support in order to enable UNRWA to continue its critical work.

## Annex VIII

### **Statement by the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations**

I offer my thanks to Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his valuable briefing. Allow me to take this opportunity, on behalf of my Government and also on my own behalf, to extend our appreciation for all the work that Mr. Mladenov has done, for his tireless efforts and, of course, for his excellent work in trying to pursue peace in the Middle East despite the wide variety of challenges faced. I wish him all the very best in his future endeavours.

The report before us today (S/2020/1234) is the sixteenth quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) submitted to the Security Council; sadly, we have seen little progress between the first quarterly report and this one. The many elements that hinder the peace process have remained relatively unchanged: ongoing settlement expansion, increased demolitions, worsening settler violence, a deplorable humanitarian situation, civilian casualties and the absence of direct and credible negotiations between the parties.

Resolution 2334 (2016) remains the last major achievement of the Council on the question of Palestine. Although it was once thought to be a major breakthrough, we are reminded today that, in the four years since its adoption, nothing has truly changed, especially for the Palestinian people. I had high hopes when I joined the Council two years ago, but I am saddened that there has been progress; on the contrary, there have been setbacks. People are still dying in the Palestine territory. We are still seeing many issues involving violations of the resolution, as well as many issues that are even more saddening for all of us. Against that backdrop, allow me to convey the following points.

First, there is an urgent need to create positive momentum for the peace process. In paragraphs 8 and 9 of resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council, respectively, “[c]alls upon all parties to continue, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations” and “[u]rges in this regard the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts”.

Indonesia welcomes and reiterates its support of President Abbas’s call to convene an international conference in early 2021.

We are encouraged by the report of the Secretary-General, particularly the efforts of the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Egypt, France and Germany, in trying to jump-start the peace process, as reported.

All efforts and initiatives should be directed towards upholding Palestinian rights and implementing the two-State solution, as the only way to bring a sustainable peace to the region.

More important, we remain hopeful for the continued intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks and stress the importance of unity among Palestinians to create a conducive and inclusive environment for the peace process.

Our hope is that there might be a new beginning in 2021 — that there might be more jump-starting of the peace process and greater momentum towards reaching the two-State solution.

Secondly, any violations must have consequences. In paragraph 1 of resolution 2334 (2016), the Council also “[r]eaffirms that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law”. As

such, the message is clear. Those who speak the English language know very well that the message is clear.

We call on the international community to demand accountability and ensure that any violations have consequences. If we ever truly wish for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, we simply cannot allow a culture of impunity to prevail. We in the Council continue to reiterate that point about impunity, but in this particular case we have not done our job. We strongly urge the Israeli authorities to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities and to fully respect international law.

Thirdly, we recall the obligations of the occupying Power. As vaccines for the coronavirus disease continue to become available, we would like to remind Israel of its obligation as the occupying Power under international law to protect the lives and safety of the Palestinian population, particularly in providing the much-needed vaccine.

The international community should also continue to extend its support to the Palestinians and leave no one behind, including support through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

As this is Indonesia's last meeting in the Council on the question of Palestine, allow me to conclude by quoting our first President, Sukarno:

*“As long as the freedom of Palestine has yet to be returned to the Palestinians, then it will forever be for Indonesia to stand in defiance against the occupation by Israel.”*

It was true then, it is true now and it will remain true for the future: until the Palestinian people are no longer denied their legal and inalienable rights to create a sovereign and independent State, we will continue to fight for their cause.

Although we will no longer sit on the Council next year, we can assure members that Indonesia will always extend its unequivocal support and solidarity to the Palestinian people, and we will remain steadfast and unyielding in our support for the Palestinian cause.

*“Kita tidak akan pernah menyerah untuk perjuangan Palestina dan untuk kebenaran.”*

Loosely translated: “We will continue to fight for the Palestinian cause: it is holy and just and it is the right thing to do”.

I hope the Council, in future, will continue to do the right thing.

**Annex IX****Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Niger to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2020/1234). My delegation paid keen attention to the briefing of the Special Coordinator and takes note of the Secretary-General's observations regarding the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The Niger deplores the lack of progress in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), adopted four years ago, and remains concerned by what is set out in the report of the Secretary-General.

The increase in the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the continuation of the demolition and seizure of Palestinian structures, including schools and agricultural land, and the upsurge in attacks and violence against Palestinian civilians, including women and children, constitute flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and the principles of international law, which we condemn and which must cease. The same goes for acts of provocation and hate speech; the launching of rockets towards residential areas in Israel; the disproportionate use of force against Palestinian civilians, who are often unarmed; arbitrary detention, including of children; and extrajudicial punishments.

My delegation notes the upsurge in settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories as one of the most worrisome trends, which threatens not only to undermine the work achieved since 1967 to the present day by the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, the parties themselves and the entire international community, but also to jeopardize the prospects for a future Palestinian State that is sovereign and viable and contiguous with Israel.

The Niger takes note of the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab countries and expresses the hope that the momentum of that rapprochement will help to ease tensions in the area and pave the way for a lasting peace and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East.

However, the normalization of relations must not come at the expense of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a viable independent State living in peace with Israel, as envisaged by the internationally accepted parameters for the settlement of the crisis.

Any attempt to deal with the conflict outside those parameters will only prolong instability and violence and runs counter to the two-State solution, the only just and lasting option that will allow the two peoples to achieve their legitimate aspirations. It is equally crucial for all of us, in particular the Council, to spare no effort in implementing United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016).

The situation in the Gaza Strip represents a further source of concern addressed in the report of the Secretary-General. The upsurge in rocket and mortar fire from Gaza towards residential areas of Israel continues to violate international law and such actions must cease.

The many challenges facing Gaza — including poverty, food insecurity, overpopulation, high unemployment, restrictions on imports and the free movement of persons, and the fragility of the health system and of the management of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic — cannot be overcome without the lifting of the illegal blockade Israel has continuously imposed on the area for 13 years.

It is just as important that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East have the resources it needs to continue providing vital services to the thousands of Palestinian families in need, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to recall that it is more important than ever for us to step up efforts and the necessary pressure to ensure that our decisions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), are not merely empty words. It is just as important that we push for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process following years of interruption.

In that regard, the trend over recent months of normalization in relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours and the political will demonstrated by the Palestinian Authority must serve as a springboard for the revitalization of the peace talks with a view to achieving a just, lasting and equitable solution to the crisis.

Finally, we commend Mr. Mladenov for his tireless efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict throughout his time in office. We wish him the greatest of success in his new role.

**Annex X****Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Russia to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy**

[Original: Russian]

We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We express our appreciation for the diligent work he has done in his nearly six years in office, which were extremely complex years for the Middle East peace process and required substantial efforts — not to achieve progress, unfortunately, but rather to maintain the central role of the United Nations and the international legal basis for a peaceful solution of the Palestinian question. We wish Mr. Mladenov every success in his new endeavours, in which he has our full support. We also stand ready to render comprehensive support to the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

At the same time, we will maintain our consistent and principled position in favour of a just solution of the Palestinian question on the basis of the international legal framework endorsed by the United Nations, including its resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the fundamental principles of the two-State solution. That foundation provides for creating an independent, sovereign and territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace with Israel. Annual votes on relevant resolutions in the General Assembly clearly demonstrate the continuing international consensus that there is no alternative to that recognized foundation for a solution.

All final-status issues must be resolved through direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. President Abbas has reiterated his readiness for dialogue under the auspices of the Quartet of international mediators. We call on our partners in the Quartet — the United Nations, the European Union and the United States of America — to step up their cooperation to that end. We are ready to involve key regional players in those efforts. We need to pool our efforts and use the entire potential of collective diplomacy.

We are extremely concerned by the information received about the progress in implementing resolution 2334 (2016). We understand from the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1234) that in October and November the Israeli authorities endorsed one of the largest-scale plans to date for the construction of new housing units, including in Area C and deep into the occupied Palestinian territories. Construction in the area of East Jerusalem threatens to further undermine the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian State as envisaged by United Nations resolutions.

We reaffirm our principled position that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are unlawful. We call for an end to settlement activity and the policy of demolishing Palestinian property. We are also concerned by the statistics provided by the United Nations, which indicate that in 2020 the number of buildings demolished increased by 72 per cent as compared with the previous year.

At the same time, violence and rocket launches against Israeli territory must stop, and joint efforts should be undertaken to counter the threat of terrorism.

The task of restoring Palestinian unity remains as relevant as ever. We will continue our efforts in that area by providing assistance to our Egyptian friends.

In addition, the international community must take active steps to improve the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, especially against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease pandemic. We are extremely concerned about the reports of the difficult financial situation currently facing the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose work spans not only the humanitarian but also the political dimension and acts as a stabilizing influence on the Palestinian territories and the Middle East as a whole. The leadership of UNRWA is taking steps to enhance performance and reduce overheads, which are commendable. For its part, Russia continues to support UNRWA and calls on the entire international community to do likewise.

**Annex XI****Statement by the Second Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Halimah Amirah Faridah DeShong**

At the outset, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive presentation on the sixteenth quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2020/1234).

As the organ charged with maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council fails all too often, through its inaction and inability, to fulfil its responsibility to protect Palestinians living under occupation. It is imperative that the Council facilitate the resumption of talks between both parties towards the achievement of a viable two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

The goal of a two-State solution is today under serious threat. Throughout 2020, the international community has seen the continuation and expansion of settlements, settler violence, access restrictions, the demolition of homes and other structures and the eviction of families across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As we look forward to 2021, we call for an end to all illegal activities and for full adherence to international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Similarly, we reiterate President Abbas's call on the United Nations to convene an international conference in early 2021 to launch "a genuine peace process" between Israel and the Palestinians.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains concerned about attacks against civilians, particularly those directed against children, in the occupied Palestinian territory. The reported killing of a 14-year-old Palestinian boy, as highlighted in a recent letter to the President of the Council (see S/2020/1175), leaves a stain on the conscience of the international community. We use this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to upholding the principles enshrined within the Convention on the Rights of the Child and we call on all parties to fully respect international law, international humanitarian law, the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention and other international conventions.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, we welcome the recent launch of the humanitarian response plan on 17 December and encourage the international community to contribute to that plan, in an effort to help people made vulnerable in the occupied Palestinian territory. We also commend the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide critical services to 5.7 million Palestinian refugees across the Middle East amid a growing crisis that is made worse by the pandemic. We appeal to the international community to provide much-needed assistance to Palestinian refugees through that important Agency.

Let me reiterate that there can be no comprehensive and lasting peace without a resolution of the decades-long conflict on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps. The two-State solution must remain the primary focal point for any future talks. In that connection, we reaffirm our commitment to the two-State solution and reiterate that any annexation of territory in the West Bank severely undermines prospects for lasting peace.

Before concluding, I take this opportunity to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his important work on the Middle East peace process over the past five to six years. We wish him much success in his new assignment.

## Annex XII

### **Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matjila**

Let me begin by thanking Mr. Mladenov for his sobering briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and his concerted efforts to resolve the long-standing question of Palestine. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his written report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) (S/2020/1234).

Since the question of Palestine was first discussed in the Security Council, in 1948, the Council has adopted more than 100 resolutions on the issue, surely more than on any other agenda item on the Council's agenda. However, it is the agenda item that has also seen the least amount of progress. Since 1948, the Palestinian people have seen no legitimate progress in the establishment of a sovereign State of Palestine. They have seen their land, heritage and birthright seized, demolished and resettled by strangers, house by house, village by village, olive grove by olive grove, until the prospect of a peaceful, independent and contiguous Palestine is now in serious jeopardy.

The ultimate goal for all of us should be the establishment of a sovereign, independent, contiguous Palestinian State existing side by side with a safe and secure State of Israel, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, as has been stated by the Secretary-General, his Special Coordinator and many of us on the Council.

South Africa reiterates that the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and the seizure and demolition of the Palestinians' land and structures are illegal. Such actions serve only to incite hatred and violence, as evidenced in the Secretary-General's most recent report.

In two days' time, on 23 December, it will be the four-year anniversary of the almost unanimous adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). However, during that time illegal settlements, seizures and demolitions of Palestinian property and structures have continued unabated. In the four years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), more than 46,000 housing units have been announced, approved or constructed.

All of those units are without legal validity, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and are a major obstacle to the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Yet no action has been taken to address those grave violations. Each and every one of those housing units is illegal under international law and a broken promise to the Palestinian people.

In that regard, South Africa calls for the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). In addition, we call on the Council to address and take action against those who have continuously and overtly violated this and previous Security Council resolutions. It is the right, fair and just thing to do.

The staggering number of civilian casualties in the occupied Palestinian territory as reported by the Secretary-General is truly appalling. In 2020 alone, six Palestinian children have been killed and 1,048 injured by the Israeli security forces. As stated in paragraph 87 of the Secretary-General's report,

“children should not be the target of violence or put in harm's way. They should be afforded special protection from any form of violence”.

This must stop. Bullets are not a reasonable or proportional response to rocks.

Moreover, South Africa fully supports the call by Mr. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied

since 1967, and Ms. Agnès Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, for an impartial and independent investigation into the killing of Ali Ayman Abu Aliya, a 15-year-old boy, by the Israel Defense Forces, where there was no threat of death or serious injury to the Israeli security forces.

Equally concerning is the number of children held in detention. Indeed, 157 children are currently being held in Israeli custody, while two others are being held in administrative detention without charge or trial.

South Africa reiterates its call for the Council to make the long-overdue field visit to the occupied Palestinian territory by those members of the Council willing to do so. That will provide an opportunity for them to witness for themselves the conditions, hardships and challenges faced by the Palestinian people on a daily basis.

In recent months, we have seen bilateral agreements that have been hailed as breakthroughs for peace in the Middle East. However, those transactional agreements, which did not include Palestine, a significant stakeholder in Middle East peace, have not yielded tangible results for those most affected by the illegal occupation. Palestinians continue to live under occupation and are denied their most basic civil and human rights.

Those bilateral agreements do not change international law; they do not change Security Council resolutions. While Israel's annexation plans may have been suspended, de facto annexation continues with ongoing and increased settlement activity, as we have previously noted.

The situation in Gaza is deeply alarming. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the associated restrictions have further impacted the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The health-care sector is unable to cope with the increased demand, and patients with life-threatening non-COVID-19 cases are being denied permits to travel for critical medical care. We call on Israel to end its inhumane treatment of the citizens of Gaza and honour its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying Power.

In that regard, we commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), its leadership and personnel for their dedication and unfailing support for the Palestinian people in truly challenging circumstances. The Agency's financial situation is truly concerning, and we appeal to the international community to increase its financial support for UNRWA, which is a lifeline of support for millions of people.

As I conclude my statement at this, South Africa's last meeting on the question of Palestine, let me reiterate South Africa's long-standing and dedicated support for Palestine's right to fundamental freedoms, human rights and self-determination. South Africa will continue to make every effort to support the Palestinian people and their just cause. That includes advocating for political dialogue between the parties on an equal footing, based on internationally agreed parameters that take into account the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people. No peace plan or initiative can have any merit or succeed if all parties to the conflict are not included in such political processes as equal partners from the very beginning. Conflicts can be resolved only by treating each party as part of the future solution, not as a potential adversary.

## Annex XIII

### Statement by the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations

I should like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his valuable briefing and praiseworthy efforts in service of peace in the Middle East. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his sixteenth report (S/2020/1234) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

On 29 November, along with the rest of the international community, Tunisia proudly celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. On that occasion, my country reaffirmed its unwavering support for the just Palestinian cause and declared that it would stand forever with the fraternal Palestinian people in its principled defence of its legitimate rights, which cannot be extinguished with the passage of time. The most prominent of those rights is the right to establish an independent State on its territory along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, on that occasion, the international community, at the national, regional and international levels, renewed its commitment to supporting the just Palestinian cause, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In contrast to the broad international support for a two-State solution on the basis of United Nations resolutions and the agreed-upon terms of reference, the reality is that, much to our regret, the stalemate in the peace process drags on, and the occupying Power continues to deny the Palestinian people its fundamental rights and to take unilateral actions that are contrary to international law, including the expansion of settlement-building activity, intensification of house demolitions, displacement of the Palestinian population and efforts to cut the geographical connection between East Jerusalem and the West Bank, thereby seriously threatening the two-State solution and undermining the prospects for a peaceful settlement.

Perhaps the most significant factor that has encouraged the occupying authorities to continue with their hostilities against unarmed Palestinian civilians, their human rights violations in Palestine and their gross violations of international law is that the international community is not serious about holding them accountable.

In view of the gross violations that have been committed by the occupiers and their racist practices, Tunisia calls upon the Security Council and the entire international community to shoulder their responsibility to halt those violations and save the two-State solution, in particular by compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its settlement-building activities immediately and, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), completely abandon its plans to annex territory once and for all and end its occupation of Palestinian territory. Tunisia also calls upon the international community to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population and put pressure on the occupying Government to end the restrictions imposed in the occupied territories and the unjust blockade of the Gaza Strip, which are threatening the Palestinian economy with collapse and exacerbating human suffering, especially in the light of the unprecedented challenge posed by the pandemic.

In keeping with its commitment to peace as a strategic option, Tunisia renews its support for the international community's efforts to launch serious and credible negotiations in accordance with a defined timetable aimed at establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of international law, internationally authoritative resolutions and the terms of reference for the settlement of the situation. Tunisia reiterates that the Palestinians must participate in any efforts or initiatives aimed at settling the conflict and achieving peace in the region.

Accordingly, Tunisia supports the initiative launched by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to convene a plenipotentiary conference in which all stakeholders participate, with a view to embarking upon a peace process on the basis of established principles. Tunisia hopes that this initiative will receive the support it deserves from the Quartet, the Security Council and stakeholders, in order to lay the groundwork for the convening of such a conference and thereby promote security and peace in the region.

Tunisia renews its support for the vital role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays in alleviating the suffering of refugees in its various areas of operation and supporting stability in the region until a just solution to the Palestine refugee issue has been found. Tunisia urges all regional and international actors to step up the humanitarian response in order to help the Palestinian people respond to the effects of the pandemic and the economic restrictions imposed by the occupiers.

In conclusion, Tunisia reiterates that achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace and ensuring security and stability in the Middle East necessarily requires Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, in accordance with internationally authoritative resolutions, the terms of reference for the peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative.

**Annex XIV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Barbara Woodward**

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mladenov for his briefing. As others have done, I should like to pay tribute to his tireless work in that role to de-escalate tension and advance peace between the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I look forward to continuing to work with Nickolay Mladenov in his new role and to welcoming his successor.

Let me first express the United Kingdom's sadness at the death of the Palestinian child Ali Ayman Abu Aliya following clashes between the Israel Defense Forces and Palestinian civilians. We have urged Israel to ensure that its investigation is swift and comprehensive. Unfortunately, the death of Abu Aliya is not an exceptional occurrence. He is the most recent of 23 Palestinian civilians to have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank this year. The toll is unacceptable, and the United Kingdom continues to urge restraint in the use of live fire and potentially lethal force by Israeli forces. We also condemn the killing of an Israeli civilian by a Palestinian in the same period.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1234) notes, throughout this year we have seen further settlement advancement, including in highly sensitive areas around East Jerusalem. We have seen the highest level of demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures since 2016 and ongoing evictions of Palestinians from their homes. In East Jerusalem, hundreds are at risk, including those eight families facing imminent eviction in Silwan. The United Kingdom's position on those issues is clear and well known. Settlements are illegal under international law. They are an obstacle to peace, and they undermine the physical viability of the two-State solution. Demolitions and evictions in all but the most exceptional of circumstances are illegal under international law and cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians. We urge the Government of Israel to cease those policies in order to build confidence with the Palestinians and encourage the pursuit of dialogue.

However, as resolution 2334 (2016) recognizes, settlements are not the only obstacle to peace. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement, which gravely undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. It is critical that the Palestinian leadership continue their efforts to tackle them. We also condemn violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. The Israeli security forces must provide appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

I would like to raise the Commissioner-General's urgent call for additional funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The United Kingdom has contributed £51 million, or approximately \$69 million, to UNRWA in 2020 and engaged closely with the Commissioner-General. We call on States that have cut their funding in recent years to support UNRWA now. We must do what we can to deal with the immediate needs of refugees throughout the region, preserve stability and ensure that those in need do not suffer. We are also clear that we must work with UNRWA in the longer term to help them to reach a secure and sustainable financial footing.

Recent Arab-Israeli agreements have shown that dialogue triumphs over hostility. We as the international community must now work with the parties alongside the incoming United States Administration to ensure that the closer ties and benefits of those normalization agreements are also extended to the Palestinians.

We urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to also enter into a political dialogue with the goal of ending the occupation and delivering a two-State solution.

In conclusion, unilateral steps will not deliver peace; a settlement to the conflict must be negotiated directly and reflect the religious and national interests of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Compromise will be needed on both sides. The United Kingdom continues to believe that a two-State solution is the only viable long-term solution. It is the only way to permanently end the Arab-Israeli conflict and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. As we move into a new year and a new era for the region, the international community must redouble its efforts to support the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships in delivering that peace for both their peoples.

**Annex XV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. We are incredibly grateful for his dedicated and honourable service as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace for more than five years; his diligent efforts to help resolve this conflict have been invaluable. We wish him all the best as he makes the transition out of Jerusalem, and I look forward to seeing him in the next couple of days and working with him on his next assignment.

As this year comes to a close, I would like to reflect on the progress we have made to date and how that progress has overturned a number of assumptions that framed our thinking on Middle East peace in ways that stood in the way of progress. The dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians in this forum dates back to the earliest days of the Security Council. Since 1948, there has been a stream of efforts to resolve the conflict, yet they have generally failed. Those decades-old approaches have not only fallen short but they have stymied regional economic cooperation and growth and have largely prevented Israelis and Palestinians from establishing friendly relations.

Recognizing the impasse we found ourselves in, President Trump presented a bold new vision for Middle East peace — a realistic, detailed plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while making Israelis, Palestinians and millions of others in the region both safer and more prosperous. President Trump's Vision for Peace saw Israel commit itself to working towards a two-State solution at an event that was witnessed by other Arab nations, including the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which attended the initial presentation of the Vision. Building on that momentum in August, the President then brokered a historic agreement to normalize relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel — now known as the Abraham Accords — which was the first such agreement between Israel and an Arab country since 1994.

The following month, Bahrain joined the United Arab Emirates in signing the Abraham Accords declaration at the White House, committing to an exchange of Ambassadors and launching a flurry of activity, including the first direct flights between those countries, as well as cooperative initiatives across a broad range of sectors, each of which was a major step forward in achieving an enduring and warm peace in the region. By October, the Sudan and Israel had also agreed to end the state of belligerence between them, thus extending the reach of the Abraham Accords to the African continent. Finally, on 10 December, Morocco announced that it would resume diplomatic relations with Israel and expand economic and cultural cooperation to advance regional stability. In less than four months, four States opened diplomatic relations with Israel, paving the way for still more engagement that will help bring about the prosperity envisioned under President Trump's peace plan.

For decades, the prevailing assumption was that the world would see normalized international relations with Israel only following a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, but we have proven that assumption wrong. Instead, Israeli entrepreneurs are now making regular trips to Dubai and Manama to explore economic opportunities that will benefit all their citizens, while Emirati and Bahraini entrepreneurs travel freely to Israel with the same goals. Those economic exchanges are a bright spot in a global economy that has been overshadowed by the regional conflict and the coronavirus disease.

For decades, we had also seen little progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as parties continued to reflexively resort to the same old tired rhetoric

and hardened positions. Today we see instead practical, real examples of genuine economic and cultural ties being formed. As a result, all of us in the Security Council should think long and hard about what else we may have missed or misinterpreted over the years.

We once again encourage our regional partners and the members of this body to thoughtfully consider the United States Vision for Peace. We continue to urge the Palestinians to consider the opportunities within the Vision and to negotiate with Israel and present their objections within the context of direct talks based on the Vision. A peace deal would bring much needed economic support and investment to the Palestinians and open up an even broader world of opportunities — for Palestinians, regional partners and the world. We look forward to the day, hopefully soon, when the Security Council no longer needs to debate this matter.

Last week, Jewish communities in Israel and around the world celebrated Hanukkah, the festival of lights, and there is a brightly lit Christmas tree in Manger Square at the Church of the Nativity. I hope that, amid the darkness of the winter, a global pandemic and far too many conflicts around the globe, we as a Council, and the international community more broadly, which represents so many religious and cultural traditions, will embrace the light represented by the Abraham Accords. May we all work together to seek ways to spread that light to other nations.

**Annex XVI****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Hai Anh Pham**

I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his final briefing, and especially his tireless efforts and dedication over more than five years in his capacity as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I wish him further success in his new capacity at a very crucial juncture for Libya.

As the year 2020 comes to an end, we regrettably find ourselves in the same worrisome situation. Month after month, quarter after quarter, we receive reports that little progress has been made in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Despite some recent positive signals in the cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, we have seen continued violations of most parts of the resolution.

The expansion of settlements has been continuing at an alarming rate throughout the entire year. Notably, some 50 per cent of those settlement units were located in outlying areas deep inside the occupied West Bank, impeding the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. We are particularly concerned about the plan for the construction of about 3,500 units in the strategic location of E-1. If implemented, it would significantly undermine the chances of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State as part of the negotiated two-State solution.

We would like to reiterate our position that settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We join many other States Members of the United Nations in calling on the Government of Israel to immediately cease the advancement of all settlement activities.

We are also troubled by the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures and properties in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Last month, the occupying Power carried out the most extensive demolition in the West Bank in years, not even sparing schools and basic infrastructure facilities. Decade-long petitions and appeals against the demolitions continued to be rejected. We call on Israeli authorities to end those activities immediately, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016).

While the situation has not escalated for the last few months, we remain concerned by the violence perpetrated throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and settler-related violence. The daily acts of violence threaten to widen the gap between the parties and erode the hope for negotiations and dialogue.

We call upon the parties to refrain from taking actions and making statements that could complicate the situation and hamper negotiation and dialogue. We also welcome all initiatives for international cooperation that may help achieve a just, sustainable and long-lasting solution to the Middle East peace process on the basis of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

We remain gravely concerned about the difficult living conditions and the humanitarian situation of millions of Palestinian people, in particular women and children, throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including in the Gaza Strip. We would also like to reiterate our strong support for the work undertaken by United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and by the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. In that regard, we welcome the recent launching of

the humanitarian response plan to address the humanitarian needs of Palestinians in 2021, and we urge members of the international community to fulfil its commitments and provide further support for the implementation of the plan.

In conclusion, Viet Nam reiterates its unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. We strongly support the two-State solution, including the establishment of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, peacefully coexisting with the State of Israel and with secure and internationally recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016).

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