



General Assembly Security Council

Distr.: General
24 August 2021

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventy-sixth session
Items 37 and 38 of the provisional agenda*

Security Council
Seventy-sixth year

The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the request of the General Assembly in paragraph 15 of its resolution [75/22](#). The report, which covers the period from September 2020 to August 2021, contains replies received from the parties concerned to the note verbale sent by the Secretary-General pursuant to the request contained in resolution [75/22](#), as well as the observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to move the peace process forward, with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

* [A/76/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/22](#).
2. On 2 July 2021, pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 15 of resolution [75/22](#), I addressed the following letter to the President of the Security Council:

“I have the honour of referring to resolution [75/22](#), which the General Assembly adopted on 2 December 2020, at its seventy-fifth session, under the agenda item ‘Question of Palestine’.

“Paragraph 15 of the resolution requests the Secretary-General, including through his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to continue his efforts with the parties concerned, and in consultation with the Security Council, including with regard to the reporting required pursuant to resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), towards the attainment of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the promotion of peace in the region and to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session a report on these efforts and on developments on this matter.

“In order to fulfil my reporting responsibilities under this resolution, I should be grateful if you would kindly convey to me the views of the Security Council by 19 July 2021.”

3. As at 18 August 2021, no response to that request had been received.
4. In a note verbale dated 24 May 2021, I sought the positions of States Members of the United Nations, in particular the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the State of Palestine, regarding any steps taken by them to implement the relevant provisions of the resolution. As at 18 August 2021, replies had been received from Argentina, Bahrain, Cuba, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Ecuador and the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine.
5. The note verbale dated 12 July 2021 from the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations reads as follows:

“For decades, the General Assembly has affirmed its stance on the question of Palestine by adoption of an annual resolution entitled ‘Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine’, most recently reaffirmed as resolution [75/22](#). The resolution’s provisions and the principles enshrined therein reflect the long-standing international consensus on the fundamental pillars and requirements for achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its dimensions. Regrettably, the failure to uphold these principles and implement those provisions – most starkly reflected in the profound disrespect and grave violations that continue to be perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power – have obstructed the intended contribution of this resolution towards a just and peaceful solution.

“At its seventy-fifth session, the General Assembly again overwhelmingly supported this resolution and reiterated the calls for ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; ensuring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence; and responsible international action to peacefully resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with international law, the relevant resolutions and the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine, which remains unfulfilled since the adoption of resolution [181 \(II\)](#) in 1947 and the decision to partition Palestine and the Nakba that ensued in 1948, resulting in the forced

dispossession of the majority of the Palestinian people and their expulsion from their homeland, an injustice that the Palestinian people continue to suffer to this day, denied their right to return and their most basic human rights, including to live in freedom and dignity.

“The lack of respect for international law by Israel, the occupying Power, and inaction by the international community, which has failed to uphold and implement its relevant resolutions, have prolonged and compounded this injustice, enabling Israel’s impunity and entrenchment of its illegal colonial occupation, now in its fifty-fourth year. Many characterize this as a stain on the global conscience and a litmus test for the viability of the rules-based order, maintaining that the failure to justly resolve it has severely undermined the international system’s credibility and authority, particularly that of the Security Council.

“Regrettably, while States have long condemned Israel’s non-compliance with United Nations resolutions and its ongoing violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, with many amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crimes of apartheid and persecution, as affirmed by numerous independent human rights and humanitarian organizations, legal scholars and academics, and as also recognized by numerous Governments and parliamentarians worldwide, little has been done concretely to hold Israel accountable for its violations and to compel compliance with its international legal obligations.

“But it is also evident that justly resolving the Palestine question remains a priority for the international community, as reaffirmed by countless delegations in General Assembly and Security Council debates and in the resolutions and declarations endorsed by political and regional groups, including, inter alia, the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union and the G-77 and China, including in the period since adoption of resolution [75/22](#).

“The overwhelming majority of States underscore the urgency of ending this injustice, which remains a primary source of regional and global instability, and consistently call for: ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967; Palestinian self-determination; salvaging and actualizing the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security, in sovereignty and independence, within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders; and a just solution for the Palestine refugee question based on resolution [194 \(III\)](#), with a near-unanimous call for support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ensure continuity of needed humanitarian and development assistance to over 5.7 million refugees pending a just solution. Moreover, calls are continually made for the intensification of international and regional efforts to promote that just solution in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, as repeatedly called for by the General Assembly and the Security Council, most recently in resolutions [75/22](#) and [2334 \(2016\)](#) respectively.

“While the State of Palestine is grateful for such principled positions and global support, unfortunately this has proven insufficient, as Israel, the occupying Power, carries on in contempt and mockery of the international community, disrespecting its will and trampling the law with its illegal occupation and deliberate, systematic deprivation of the Palestinian people’s inalienable rights, including those of Palestine refugees. After 73 years of Nakba and over half a century of colonial military occupation and apartheid policies,

it is clear that statements and condemnations are not enough to end this historic injustice and the longest belligerent occupation in modern history. As Israel intensifies its violations before the world's eyes, it is high time to translate such positions into immediate action aimed at upholding the Charter of the United Nations, enforcing legal obligations and ensuring accountability for the violations being perpetrated, including war crimes.

“Israel has proven beyond a doubt that it is not willing to end this illegal occupation but is instead willing to use all illegal means to fortify and prolong its control of our land and subjugation of our people indefinitely. Ending such impunity and ending the occupation therefore require the activation of all available diplomatic, political, legal mechanisms to ensure justice under the law, uphold human rights and thus ultimately realize a just peace. The absence of accountability only serves the occupation, enabling impunity at the expense of Palestinian rights, inflicting mass suffering, destroying peace prospects and devastating generations more.

“Despite continued setbacks and the deterioration of conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since the adoption of resolution [75/22](#), the State of Palestine remains committed to the path of peace and international law as the guarantor of justice, in stark contradiction to the occupying Power, which persists in its contempt of the law. At the same time, the Palestinian people and Government reiterate the appeal to all States to uphold the law and implement the provisions and commitments affirmed in United Nations resolutions, stressing shared responsibilities and the imperative of multilateral efforts to address this grave situation and realize a just solution.

“A glimpse of the Palestinian people's reality in the reporting period exposes the depth and gravity of this injustice. In just a matter of months, the world has witnessed a glaring display of Israel's impunity as the Israeli Government, military and settlers have proceeded apace with: rabid settler colonization and acts of de facto annexation; myriad measures aimed at mass dispossession of Palestinian families in occupied East Jerusalem, including in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods, and elsewhere throughout Occupied Palestine, forcibly displacing hundreds of Palestinians; provocations and incursions against the city's holy sites, including the Aqsa Mosque/Haram al-Sharif, with repeated violations of the historic and legal status quo, as well as assaults on Muslim and Christian worshippers; another violent military aggression against the Gaza Strip, killing and injuring over 250 Palestinians, including 66 children and 41 women; the wanton destruction of Palestinian homes and properties, land expropriation and exploitation of natural resources; arrest, detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children; intensification of a racist, discriminatory apartheid regime; dangerous incitement, extremism and terror against Palestinians; tightening of the 14-year Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, exacerbating dire socioeconomic conditions and the humanitarian suffering of 2 million Palestinians besieged there; and countless other measures of collective punishment, all aimed at oppressing, coercing and dispossessing our people and cementing the occupation.

“The escalation of these illegal, aggressive and destructive Israeli policies and practices has inflicted vast harm on the Palestinian people, provoking continual instability and decline of the situation on the ground on all fronts – political, security, socioeconomic and humanitarian; aggravating religious sensitivities, risking a religious conflagration; and further diminishing the viability of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 lines. Last year, the international community warned Israel against annexation and demanded an end to its illegal policies and practices, perhaps believing that Israel would abide in

good faith. The reality has proven otherwise and reaffirmed that, without action that imposes consequences for violations, Israel will continue undaunted with its crimes against the Palestinian people.

“The international community must demand a halt to all illegal Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and demand full respect for international law. The path to a just solution is clear, as enshrined in resolution 75/22 and all other relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which charts a clear path to peace and must be implemented in full. Although the Council regrettably remains paralysed on this issue, States themselves must uphold obligations to pursue accountability, reasserting the applicability of international law in all circumstances and contributing towards ending this injustice.

“International action must include support for accountability mechanisms, including legal action in courts such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, as their rulings and decisions are and will remain a primary determination of international law. The decision taken by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to initiate an investigation on the situation in Palestine must be supported and undertaken forthwith as a means of enforcing the law and ensuring justice. Diplomatic and political support for the Court is urgent in the light of attacks aimed at undermining its credibility and authority in an attempt to obstruct accountability. International courts must be able to carry out their mandate and work without interference, to end impunity in the face of serious international crimes.

“The State of Palestine also continues to call for a multilateral political process to achieve a just and peaceful solution based on the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We have appealed to the Security Council and the Quartet members – the Russian Federation and the United States along with the European Union and the United Nations – to uphold their obligations and exert serious efforts to this end, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and concerned regional and other partners and with the vital support of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Non-Aligned Movement and all peace-loving nations. We reiterate our call for the convening of an international peace conference based on the international consensus.

“The international community must realize that the demographic composition, character, status and identity of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, is being aggressively altered and the Palestinian people’s inalienable rights, including to self-determination and independence, are being perpetually obstructed absent any accountability for Israel’s crimes. This is not hearsay, but has been thoroughly documented, including by United Nations agencies, bodies and mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and numerous international, Palestinian and Israeli humanitarian and human rights organizations. Only accountability and implementation of the law can remedy this wrongful situation and give genuine meaning to the global efforts to promote justice and peace.

“The international community, including the Security Council, is not being asked to resort to extraordinary lengths to hold Israel accountable, but to simply muster the will to respect and follow through on existing frameworks and rules of law and affirmed obligations and commitments to end this injustice. Continued inaction has rewarded Israel, the occupying Power, with automatic

impunity and an abundance of time to pursue evermore criminal policies at zero cost to its international standing and relations, but with incalculable repercussions for the Palestinian people and for the viability of peace prospects and international law itself. Unless rectified, such gross violations and grave breaches, including of the *erga omnes* right to self-determination and the absolute prohibition of the acquisition of territory by force, will persist, to the detriment of the Palestinian people, the Israeli people and a future of peace, stability and security in the Middle East region and globally.

“The calls to compel Israel to respect its international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people is reaching unprecedented levels, as Governments and citizens worldwide can no longer ignore or tolerate the abhorrent reality created by Israel’s 54-year colonial occupation and apartheid regime. This was apparent in the wide support given again to resolution [75/22](#) in 2020 and in the global demonstrations held in solidarity with Palestine in 2021.

“It is past time for the international community to act on these long-standing calls. We urge strengthened support for the General Assembly’s efforts to contribute to justly resolving the Palestine question, including support for the vital efforts of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights, important mechanisms mandated by the Assembly to advance the achievement of Palestinian rights, including self-determination, and a just solution based on a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We appeal to all States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society for their support and solidarity and fulfilment of their obligations and commitments to make 2021 a year that ushers in a new era of justice, freedom, equality and peace.”

II. Developments

6. International efforts to promote the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine continued during the reporting period. The envoys of the Middle East Quartet (the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union and the United Nations) consulted one another informally throughout the year and held monthly conference calls to discuss the situation on the ground and prospects for advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace. The United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to ending the occupation and achieving a negotiated two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, and reiterated its call to all stakeholders to refrain from any unilateral action that harms the prospects of meaningful negotiations and peace. Discussions are ongoing among Quartet members regarding the way forward.

7. On 25 September 2020, in his statement to the General Assembly, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, called for the convening of an international conference in early 2021 to engage in a genuine peace process, based on international law, United Nations resolutions and the relevant terms of reference, leading to an end to the occupation and the achievement by the Palestinian people of their freedom and independence within their State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the 1967 borders.

8. Agreements between Israel and Bahrain and between Israel and the United Arab Emirates were formalized in a signing ceremony at the White House on 15 September.

On 23 October, the leaders of the United States, Israel and the Sudan announced that the Governments of Israel and the Sudan had agreed to end the state of belligerence between their countries and normalize relations. On 22 December, the Governments of Israel and Morocco agreed to establish full diplomatic, peaceful and friendly relations in a signing ceremony in Rabat. On 22 July 2021, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission received credentials from the Ambassador of Israel to Burundi, Chad and Ethiopia as an observer of the African Union.

9. On 17 November, the Palestinian leadership announced its decision to resume security and civilian coordination with Israel and accept the clearance revenues Israel collects on its behalf, after Israel suspended its annexation plans as part of the agreements it had signed with several Arab States.

10. From September to November, Fatah and Hamas held bilateral discussions in Istanbul, Turkey, and, subsequently, in Cairo. On 15 January, President Abbas issued a decree calling for legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections in 2021. On 9 February, Palestinian factions concluded additional talks in Cairo, thereby resolving several long-standing differences. On 17 February, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission concluded the registration of voters and announced that over 90 per cent of eligible voters had been registered. On 30 April, President Abbas said that he was indefinitely postponing the legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections scheduled for 2021 until the participation of Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem was guaranteed by Israel. Preparations for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections scheduled for 22 May were at an advanced stage. Some 90 per cent of eligible voters (equal to more than 2.5 million Palestinians) had registered to participate, some 50 per cent of whom were women and more than 40 per cent of whom would have been first-time voters. Thirty-six candidate lists, comprising a total of 1,389 candidates, had been cleared to participate by the Central Elections Commission, and the campaign period was set to begin on 1 May.

11. The reporting period was marked by an increase in violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. Against the backdrop of tensions in Jerusalem, violence erupted between Israel and Palestinian armed groups based in the Gaza Strip in May, leading to the worst escalation of armed hostilities since 2014. Overall, 321 Palestinians, including 80 children and 44 women, were killed by Israeli security forces as a result of air strikes and during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents, and 14,823 Palestinians were injured, including some 1,079 by live ammunition. A total of 11 Israeli civilians, including two children and six women, were killed in attacks, clashes and other incidents and 789 Israelis were injured in the course of these events. In addition, three non-Israeli civilians and one Israeli soldier were killed in Israel during the hostilities.

12. The Israeli authorities' planned forced eviction of four extended Palestine refugee families, approximately 75 people, from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood heightened tensions between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, resulting in increasingly tense protests beginning in April. In early April, videos went viral on social media depicting violent attacks by Palestinians against ultra-Orthodox Jews and attacks against Palestinians by extreme right-wing groups. Following the start of Ramadan on 13 April, there was a marked increase in unrest after the Israeli authorities installed metal barriers outside Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem, blocking access to a public area used by Palestinians. Following the installation of the barriers, widespread protests and violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces occurred in occupied East Jerusalem, in particular in the vicinity of the Aqsa Mosque and Damascus Gate, as well as in Sheikh Jarrah.

13. The unrest increased further on 22 April, when Israeli civilians marched towards Damascus Gate chanting “death to Arabs” and other anti-Arab slogans and clashed with Palestinians, who were also chanting inflammatory rhetoric, before both groups were dispersed by Israeli security forces. The removal by those forces of the barriers, on 25 April, temporarily restored a relative calm to the area. Beginning on 28 April, Palestinians held daily protests in the Sheikh Jarrah area, which, combined with a continued heavy presence of Israeli security forces and provocation by Israeli civilians, including settlers and Knesset members, triggered repeated clashes throughout East Jerusalem.

14. On 10 May, Jerusalem Day, the situation escalated further when clashes erupted in Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount as Palestinians threw stones from the compound and Israeli security forces entered the Aqsa Mosque compound, launching stun grenades, using tear gas and firing rubber-coated metal bullets. Subsequently, the Israeli authorities took steps to reduce tensions, including by rerouting a scheduled demonstration, organized by right-wing Israeli activists to mark Jerusalem Day, away from the Muslim quarter of the Old City, postponing a Supreme Court hearing on the Sheikh Jarrah evictions and barring Jewish visits to the holy sites. Nevertheless, the violence and heavy security presence continued within the Old City.

15. On 14 May, the deadliest day in the occupied West Bank in over a decade, 10 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in demonstrations and clashes and about 250 were injured by live bullets, raising concerns that Israeli security forces had employed excessive use of force. A total of 8,217 Palestinians were injured, 4,703 of them from tear gas inhalation. Most of the fatalities resulted from the use by Israeli security forces of live ammunition in the context of demonstrations or clashes or in response to attacks or attempted attacks.

16. On 10 May, late in the afternoon, a spokesperson for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades of Hamas published a statement giving Israel “an ultimatum until six in the evening today to withdraw its forces from the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and release all detainees from the recent events in Jerusalem”. That evening, Palestinian armed groups indiscriminately fired 191 rockets and mortars towards Israel, including some towards Jerusalem, to which the Israel Defense Forces responded with 60 missiles and shells, hitting Gaza. For the next 10 days, Israel continued intensive air strikes and shelling, reportedly targeting armed groups and their infrastructure, while Palestinian armed groups in Gaza continued to launch rockets and mortars on an unprecedented scale towards Israel, including from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods. The inner compound yard of one United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school was struck by two Israeli missiles despite the school having been designated an emergency shelter for civilians during the hostilities. In the context of a subsequent investigation aimed at finding a way to better secure the building, UNRWA discovered a tunnel under the school and subsequently condemned the existence and potential use by Palestinian armed groups of such tunnels underneath its schools in the strongest possible terms. There is no indication of the existence of any entry or exit points for the tunnel on the premises. Initial risk assessments of UNRWA premises by the United Nations Mine Action Service confirmed the existence of unexploded ordnance that could have led to further damage. Continuing assessments and activities were initially halted by Hamas authorities. After UNRWA protested these steps, highlighting the inviolability and neutrality of UNRWA premises and the need to ensure the safe return of children to their schools, Hamas vacated the school. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to remove any remaining explosive ordnance as quickly as possible.

17. Between 10 and 21 May, Palestinian armed groups fired over 4,000 rockets and projectiles towards Israel, with over 600 falling in the Gaza Strip, reportedly

accounting for some Palestinian casualties. According to Israeli sources, Israeli forces carried out over 1,500 strikes from the air, land and sea across the Gaza Strip. Israeli air strikes and shelling, directed at what Israel said were targets containing militant installations, caused extensive damage to civilian property and infrastructure, including public buildings, residential homes and commercial units, including four high-rise towers, one of which hosted international media outlets. Damage was also inflicted on humanitarian assets, medical facilities and roads. Rockets from Gaza reached as far as the outskirts of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and its suburbs and Ben Gurion Airport. The rockets struck multiple locations, causing damage to residential and commercial property, as well as to schools and a crude oil pipeline.

18. During the escalation in Gaza, the Security Council held four extraordinary sessions on 10, 12, 16 and 18 May, the General Assembly held an urgent meeting to address the situation on 20 May, and the Human Rights Council held a special session on 27 May.

19. Throughout the hostilities, the United Nations worked with all sides to restore calm, de-escalate the situation and prevent any further loss of life. The escalation continued until both sides announced a cessation of hostilities, which began at 2 a.m. on 21 May.

20. The armed hostilities took a severe toll on the civilian population. Between 10 and 21 May, 259 Palestinians were killed in Gaza, including 66 children and 41 women (4 of whom were pregnant), with 248 of them, including 63 children, killed in air strikes and by falling rockets. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, 1,948 Palestinians were injured. At least 129 of those killed were civilians. In some cases, families, including women, children and infants, were killed in their homes by Israeli air strikes. Over 40 people are estimated to have been killed in a series of air strikes reportedly targeting tunnels under residential areas in Gaza City overnight on 15 May. The fatalities included the head of internal medicine at Al-Shifa Hospital, the main hospital in the Gaza Strip, and one of just a few neurologists in Gaza, as well as members of their families, and nine members of a family – two women and seven children – from the Al-Shati refugee camp.

21. In Israel, a 5-year-old boy was killed by a rocket in Sderot and a 16-year-old girl and her father were killed in Lod. Nine Israelis, including two children, four women and one soldier, and three foreign nationals were killed, and hundreds of Israelis were injured during the hostilities. Throughout the 11 days of hostilities, hundreds of thousands of Israelis across much of the south and centre of the country repeatedly had to run for shelter amid rocket barrages. In addition, incendiary balloons and kites launched from Gaza sparked dozens of fires in southern Israel during the period.

22. While the cessation of hostilities agreed between Israel and Hamas has largely held, there have subsequently been 62 incidents in which Palestinian armed groups have launched incendiary balloons towards Israel since the cessation of hostilities came into effect, causing fires. In retaliation, the Israeli Defense Forces carried out 22 strikes and fired 49 missiles against what they said were Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, injuring two women and damaging property. On 16 August, armed groups fired at least one rocket from Gaza towards Israel. No injuries or damages were reported.

23. Beyond the human tragedy for both Palestinians and Israelis, and the physical damage of 11 days of fighting, the economic impact of the hostilities in May further exacerbated the existing humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and severely weakened the economy of Gaza. On 6 July, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union published the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. According to the Assessment, damages in Gaza are estimated at between \$290 million and \$380 million, while economic losses may reach nearly \$200 million. The social

sector was hit hardest, significantly weakening the safety net of the most vulnerable. The immediate and short-term recovery and reconstruction needs, over the first 24 months, are estimated at between \$345 million and \$485 million. Also on 6 July, a technical meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians was held to align donor efforts to help address both the aftermath of the May escalation and the significant fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority.

24. By 2021, 9,566 of 11,000 houses destroyed during the 2014 conflict in Gaza had been rebuilt and the construction of another 639 houses was under way. Overall, it is estimated that the May conflict resulted in damages to approximately 4,100 housing units, 1,600 of which were destroyed and 2,500 of which were partially damaged. Total damages are assessed at between \$130 million and \$160 million. Over 113,000 Palestinians were temporarily displaced in UNRWA schools or with host families during the hostilities, heightening the risk of the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) owing to overcrowding. Approximately 600 families (3,600 individuals) have remained internally displaced for more than six years, since the 2014 conflict.

25. During the May conflict, damage was inflicted on 181 schools, including 41 UNRWA schools, in addition to 116 kindergartens and 16 health facilities. Electricity supply across the Gaza Strip was further reduced from an average of 15 hours a day to 5–6 hours per day owing to damage to key electricity feeder lines, transformers and networks, as well as to Israel barring entry for fuel delivered through the United Nations for the Gaza power plant, causing disruptions to the provision of basic services, including water, sanitation and health care. About 800,000 people temporarily lacked regular access to safe piped water as a result of damage to infrastructure and the reduced electricity supply. Israel reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing on 17 May to facilitate the entry of a shipment from Jordan of medical aid and of medical personnel. The crossing came under mortar fire from Gaza, however, and was closed.

26. Following the ceasefire, Israel gradually lifted some restrictions on the import and export of goods. On 28 June, fuel deliveries for the Gaza Power Plant again resumed through the Kerem Shalom crossing under the existing United Nations framework overseen by the United Nations Office for Project Services with support from Qatar, returning electricity supply to its previous level, roughly 14 hours per day, at the end of July. The entry of construction material is still restricted, preventing urgent repairs to hundreds of sites, including schools, hospitals and water facilities. In addition, Israel reinstated the designated fishing zone off the coast of Gaza, which, as of 18 August, stands at 12 nautical miles.

27. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search-and-arrest operations and other incidents resulted in the death of 66 Palestinians, including 14 children, and injuries to 13,011 Palestinians, including at least 696 children and 48 women. Two Israelis, including one woman, were killed and 109 were injured in the course of these events.

28. Throughout the reporting period, protests and violent clashes took place throughout the occupied West Bank almost daily. During clashes in May, Israeli security forces regularly used live ammunition against Palestinian protesters, resulting in the killing of 24 Palestinians and injuries to 744 others. Israeli security forces also continued to conduct search-and-arrest operations and to detain Palestinians, including children. The Palestinian Authority continued to arrest individuals associated with Hamas and political parties other than Fatah, intensifying such actions in April, prior to scheduled Palestinian elections, and again in May, following the postponement of elections on 30 April. Hamas authorities in Gaza also summoned and, in some cases, detained Fatah affiliates. Since September 2020, the

Israel Prison Service has not responded to freedom-of-information requests by Israeli non-governmental organizations for monthly statistics concerning Palestinians held in Israeli detention. According to Palestinian sources, however, as of 5 August, 540 Palestinians were being held by the Israeli authorities in administrative detention.

29. Increasingly, Israel restricted freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including by arresting and prosecuting through the military courts Palestinian civil society actors, human rights defenders, students and political figures. Of particular concern was the detention, including administrative detention, of members of Palestinian civil society organizations on broad charges of membership of “unlawful” or terrorist organizations, and other attempts to discredit the work of civil society organizations and undercut their funding. OHCHR has raised serious concerns about allegations of ill-treatment during the arrest, interrogation and detention of Palestinians.

30. On 24 June, Nizar Banat, a prominent political activist and former parliamentary candidate, died following his arrest and detention by the Palestinian Security Forces. According to his family, he was severely beaten during his arrest. Following the incident, Palestinians held demonstrations across the occupied West Bank. In Ramallah, on 26 June and 5 July, the Palestinian Security Forces beat protesters with batons and indiscriminately fired tear gas and stun grenades. On 26 June, the Palestinian Security Forces also failed to stop violent acts by groups of persons not in uniform reportedly acting in a coordinated manner with security personnel. Those acts resulted in violence targeting journalists and human rights monitors, including one United Nations staff member. Women present at the demonstrations reported having been subjected to sexual harassment and gender-based threats on social media afterwards. In the following weeks, several prominent activists, electoral candidates, journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers were also arrested by Palestinian forces. All were subsequently released.

31. During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities advanced or approved plans for some 6,600 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, marking a decrease compared with some 8,000 units during the previous reporting period. On 14 and 15 October, in one of the largest collective advancements in recent years, the Israeli authorities approved plans for the construction of some 5,000 housing units in Area C, approximately 80 per cent of which are planned to be built in settlements in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank, in areas further impeding the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. As at 18 August, citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized 908 structures, displacing 1,084 people, including 608 children and 239 women, and otherwise affecting about 9,500 others. During the reporting period, a total of 79 newly built structures were demolished on the basis of Military Order 1797, which authorizes an expedited process for the removal of structures. Structures can thus be demolished as early as 96 hours after the delivery of a notice, thereby preventing most owners from being heard before a judicial body. An additional 72 structures were demolished by their owners, displacing 140 people, including 69 children and 35 women. The Israeli authorities also demolished structures and homes built by settlers in unauthorized settlement outposts.

32. On 2 August, the High Court of Justice of Israel again adjourned an appeal hearing requested by four Palestinian families that were under threat of eviction from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. The hearing had originally been scheduled for 10 May but was postponed amid heightened tensions in East Jerusalem. In addition, several judicial proceedings related to the eviction of Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan were under way. Additional legal developments are expected towards the end of 2021.

33. During the reporting period, 133 violent incidents involving Israeli settlers were recorded, resulting in 485 Palestinians being injured, including 13 women and 304 children. Of the total, 136 injuries were attributed to Israeli settlers and the remainder to subsequent clashes with the Israel Defense Forces. There were also 304 incidents by Israeli settlers which involved damage to Palestinian property. During the same period, there were 49 violent incidents by Palestinians against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the occupied West Bank, resulting in the killing of two Israelis and injuries to 69 Israelis.

34. On 5 February, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court decided that the Court's territorial jurisdiction in *Situation in the State of Palestine* extends to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On 3 March, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court confirmed in a statement that her office had initiated an investigation regarding the situation in the State of Palestine covering crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court alleged to have been committed since 13 June 2014.

35. In its resolution [S-30/1](#), the Human Rights Council decided to establish an ongoing independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and to investigate also the underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.

36. The fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority continued to be a source of significant concern. The budget gap for the current budget year is expected to be of more than \$1 billion. On 11 July, the Government of Israel approved the freezing of approximately \$180 million in annual clearance revenues collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority in monthly instalments. The amount to be withheld is equal to the amount that the Israeli authorities allege that the Palestinian Authority paid during 2020 to security prisoners, detainees and the families of Palestinians killed while carrying out attacks against Israelis.

37. The socioeconomic situation of Palestinians was further compounded by COVID-19. The rising number of infections continues to pose grave risks in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The impact of COVID-19 on populations in these areas was exacerbated by the overall political climate, which presented challenges to response efforts, and by the imposed closures on Gaza.

38. During the reporting period, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the humanitarian partners of the United Nations supported COVID-19-related diagnoses, case management, infection prevention and control, communication on the risk posed by COVID-19, community engagement and vaccine strategy development and roll-out. With support from WHO and UNICEF through the global COVAX Facility, the Palestinian Authority was able to deliver a first batch of some 60,000 vaccines to the West Bank and Gaza on 17 March. By 25 July, the Palestinian Ministry of Health had received 1,541,620 vaccines through the COVAX Facility (supported by WHO, UNICEF and the Gavi Alliance) and bilateral arrangements, and had vaccinated 495,621 people in the West Bank and Gaza by 2 August. Israel also vaccinated East Jerusalemites and approximately 100,000 Palestinians holding permits to enter Israel.

III. Observations

39. During the reporting period, I delivered four reports to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which I expressed

my concern regarding the continued lack of implementation of the provisions of the resolution. In my reports, I took note of international efforts and reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, and to realizing the vision of two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace within secured and recognized borders on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

40. The rapid escalation of violence in May, the violent attacks against Palestinian and Israeli civilians and the incitement to violence spiralled quickly out of control and into a devastating exchange between Israel and armed groups in Gaza on a scale not seen in years. These events have only deepened the divisions between Israelis and Palestinians and made progress towards peace an even greater challenge.

41. The indiscriminate launching of rockets, mortars and incendiary devices towards Israeli civilian population centres, including from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods, by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and others must cease. I recall that international humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate attacks and requires parties to a conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives. Although Israel took a number of precautions, such as giving advance warning of attacks in some cases, air strikes in densely populated areas resulted in a high level of civilian fatalities and injuries and in the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. Such strikes raise concerns about compliance by Israel with the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and take all feasible precautions to spare the civilian population and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

42. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. I reiterate that children should not be the target of violence or be put in harm's way. They should be afforded special protection from any form of violence and be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

43. I am deeply concerned by the multiple instances in which officials exacerbated the tensions and violence through unacceptable rhetoric or provocative actions. Some such statements and actions contributed to the deadly escalation. As stated in my reports to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), I continue to urge leaders on all sides to refrain from incitement and to condemn, consistently and unequivocally, acts of terror and violence in all their forms.

44. I welcome the cessation of hostilities agreed on 21 May and recognize the important efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States in support of ending the violence. I also wish to thank my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his efforts. Nevertheless, the situation in Gaza remains deeply worrying, including in respect of the severe emotional trauma and suffering experienced by the people of Gaza owing to years of prolonged Israeli closures and severe economic and movement restrictions, the nature of Hamas rule and the ongoing threat of violence. Although the agreement on the cessation of hostilities continues to hold, it is fragile and the risk of a major escalation is ever present.

45. On 27 May, the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory launched an inter-agency flash appeal, having identified a need for around \$95 million for critical programming. As at 18 August, some \$45 million have been raised. I thank donors for their generous support and encourage additional contributions so that pressing humanitarian needs can be addressed. I also encourage support to be provided to meet the immediate and short-term recovery and reconstruction needs, estimated at between \$345 million and

\$485 million over 24 months. More support, including from Israel, is also needed for the Palestinian response to COVID-19, to ensure that Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory receive a fair and timely share of the vaccines.

46. Humanitarian and economic support alone, however, will not help to overcome the challenges in Gaza. These challenges require political solutions and the will to pursue them. It is vital that Hamas and other factions end their militant activities and military build-up. Taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Only by fully lifting the debilitating closures can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism remains critical for facilitating reconstruction and supporting vital infrastructure projects to bolster water and energy networks in Gaza.

47. Reports of violent incidents throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remain of concern. I unequivocally condemn all attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians and call upon all sides to refrain from violence and to clearly and unequivocally condemn attacks when they occur. All perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.

48. I reiterate the call for the status quo at the holy sites to be respected and upheld in line with the special and historical role of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

49. The postponement of the Palestinian election process has had significant implications, both for the security situation on the ground and the future of the Palestinian national project. I commend the tireless efforts of the Palestinian Central Elections Commission, which, throughout the process, ensured that all the technical aspects were effectively implemented. The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza would be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government. Moreover, setting a new and timely date for elections would be important for reassuring the Palestinian people that their voices will be heard. I reiterate that Palestinian unity is crucial for reaching the larger objective of a Palestinian State and lasting peace.

50. The general state of human rights and freedoms in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remains of concern. I reiterate my earlier calls to end the practice of administrative detention and either to charge detainees, where there are grounds to do so, or to release them immediately. All children should be treated with due consideration for their age and be detained only in situations justified under the applicable rules of international humanitarian law and international or applicable human rights law. Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly must be respected by Israel and any restriction must be imposed in accordance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law. Accusations of terrorism must be made in accordance with the framework defined in article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including respect of fair trial guarantees.

51. I call upon the Palestinian Authority to ensure that allegations of disproportionate use of force by the Palestinian Security Forces are investigated and that all perpetrators are held to account. The Palestinian people must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly. Arbitrary and politically motivated arrests must cease.

52. I remain deeply troubled by the continued settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I reiterate 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 of international law. I urge the Government of Israel to stop the advancement of all settlement plans immediately.

53. Continued violence between Palestinians and Israeli settlers and other civilians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is of deep concern. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population. All incidents must be investigated and those responsible must be held accountable.

54. The impact on women of the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza is of particular concern. The proportion of women participating in the labour force in Gaza, where about 70 per cent of women are unemployed, is among the lowest in the world. These poor employment prospects result in female-headed households facing greater poverty and food insecurity. In turn, poverty and a lack of economic opportunities are key factors driving violence against women in Gaza, while the humanitarian crisis has resulted in numerous health issues for women. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, gender-based violence has soared by 300 per cent since the COVID-19 pandemic began; the proportion of women participating in the labour force has shrunk to 16 per cent and only 14 per cent of senior positions in the public sector are held by women. The United Nations continues to assist Palestinian women and girls in a broad range of areas, but much more needs to be done to address their needs and vulnerabilities.

55. I would like to reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israel Defense Force soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to provide the family members of those civilians with any information it has on their fate, as required by international humanitarian law. I also remain deeply concerned at the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of Palestinians killed while carrying out or allegedly carrying out attacks against Israelis and call upon Israel to return withheld bodies to their families.

56. I remain extremely concerned by the shortfall of \$100 million in the UNRWA programme budget. I welcome the resumption of funding from the United States last April and call upon Member States to ensure that the agency has the liquidity to conduct operations. UNRWA is vital to the region's stability, especially in the aftermath of a devastating conflict. I also welcome efforts by Jordan and Sweden to organize an international conference on UNRWA in October. Investing in UNRWA remains indispensable for achieving regional stability and peace in the Middle East.

57. I would like to express my deep appreciation to my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his outstanding service in what remains a challenging context. I am also grateful to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, and to UNRWA staff for the remarkable work carried out on behalf of Palestine refugees. I pay tribute too to all United Nations staff who work under difficult circumstances in the service of the Organization.

58. I will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards a resolution of the conflict that would end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and establish an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.