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Provisional

President: Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
China	Mr. Lie Cheng
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
France	Mr. Delattre
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Tenya
Poland	Mr. Lewicki
Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
Sweden	Mr. Skoog
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Israel and Lebanon to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on recent developments in northern Israel related to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

As members of the Council are aware, on 4 December the Israel Defense Forces announced that they were conducting Operation Northern Shield to uncover and disable tunnels believed to cross the Blue Line from Lebanon into Israel. Today, two weeks later, the Operation is ongoing. During that period, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) carried out a series of technical visits at suspected tunnel sites identified by the Israel Defense Forces near the Blue Line. Based on its own findings, UNIFIL confirmed the existence of four tunnels south of the Blue Line. Technical assessments carried out by UNIFIL further determined that at least two of those tunnels — one in the vicinity of Metulla, close to Kfar Kila, north of the Blue Line, and one near Zarit, close to Ramyah, north of the Blue Line — cross the Blue Line and constitute violations of resolution 1701 (2006).

From the outset, UNIFIL sought to accurately assess the alleged violations and to work with the parties to maintain the prevailing calm along the Blue Line. To that end, General Del Col, UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, in coordination with the Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon, has consistently engaged with the authorities in Israel and Lebanon. A meeting of the tripartite mechanism took place on

5 December, at which there was an initial exchange of information between the two parties and a reaffirmation of their commitment to avoid any escalation. Based on additional information obtained by UNIFIL's technical teams, the Head of Mission and Force Commander held several meetings with the Lebanese authorities, including President Aoun.

A thorough investigation to establish the trajectories and points of origin of the identified tunnels is a complex task. The tunnels are between 29 and 46 metres below ground, difficult to detect and in close proximity to areas that are sensitive for both parties. While the tunnels do not appear, thus far, to have exit points on the Israeli side, they are a serious violation of resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL is acting judiciously to complete its investigations of the tunnels — with technical teams on the ground — and to work with both parties to ensure that any tunnels, which are in violation of resolution 1701 (2006), are disabled decisively and safely.

This is a matter of serious concern. The United Nations, including the Secretariat, has requested the Lebanese authorities to ensure urgent follow-up actions in accordance with the responsibilities of the Government of Lebanon pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL has requested the Lebanese authorities to work with the mission to identify and disable any tunnels crossing the Blue Line from Lebanon in violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

I commend both the Israeli Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces for their stated commitment to continue to use the liaison and coordination arrangements established with UNIFIL and their intention to maintain the prevailing calm along the Blue Line and avoid any escalation. The potential for miscalculation, however, cannot be underestimated. The parties have been reminded that provocative activities along the Blue Line and heightened rhetoric contribute to an environment of increased risk.

UNIFIL has observed subsequent gatherings of civilians in Meiss Ej Jabal (Sector West) in close proximity to the Blue Line. On 10 December, UNIFIL observed a group of 30 to 50 individuals in civilian clothes, led by a member of Parliament in Lebanon, gather near Meiss Ej Jabal, with several individuals crossing the Blue Line. On 16 December, about 500 people, including members of Parliament, participated in a seven-hour-long gathering in Meiss Ej Jabal. Many

of them crossed the Blue Line in connection with the protest.

On 17 December, in connection with works being carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces south of the Blue Line near Meiss Ej Jabal, a Lebanese Armed Forces soldier cocked his weapon, directing it towards the Israeli Defense Forces. That prompted a total of seven Lebanese Armed Forces and nine Israeli Defense Forces soldiers to take position, pointing their weapons at each other. UNIFIL's liaison branch, present throughout the entire period, intervened and was successful in de-escalating the situation.

UNIFIL has deployed additional troops and liaison teams to sensitive locations along the Blue Line. UNIFIL will continue to assist the parties to maintain calm and meet their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). I would like to recognize the continued important role of UNIFIL under the leadership of Major General Del Col. I would also like to thank the Security Council for its continued support to UNIFIL. We will continue to keep the Council apprised of relevant developments.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing today.

Over the past few weeks we have seen images and news of tunnels discovered in northern Israel. As the Under-Secretary-General has told us this morning, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has confirmed so far the existence of four tunnels close to the Blue Line and to date has independently verified that two of those tunnels cross the Blue Line. UNIFIL has also determined that two of those tunnels constitute violations of resolution 1701 (2006). We can only speculate how many more will be uncovered in the coming days and weeks. Those facts are indisputable, and they should leave no doubt on who is responsible. The United States has taken Hizbullah's threats to the security of Israel and the Israeli people at face value, and it is high time that the Council and the international community do so as well.

The Council's differing views on Hizbullah have undermined the international community's efforts to support peace and stability along the Blue Line and

between Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon play a critical role in ensuring peace and stability. We call upon them to proactively implement their respective mandates to advance efforts towards a durable peace between Israel and Lebanon.

It is both regrettable and incomprehensible that some Council members dismiss the threat that Hizbullah poses and its ability to act as a spoiler to the Council's broader objective for peace between Israel and Lebanon. It is time that the Security Council acts as one and speaks in one voice — Hizbullah is a serious and a real threat. That reality must underpin all of our actions moving forward from today.

To those who are not yet convinced that Hizbullah is a serious threat to the peace and security of Israel, Lebanon and the region I ask the following — What further proof do you need? Did we forget the violence in 2006? Do we not hear Nasrallah bragging of his vast stocks of precise weapons and his ability to hit anywhere inside Israel? We appreciate that Israel and Lebanon expressed to UNIFIL that they have no intention to escalate the situation along the Blue Line any will continue to work with UNIFIL to that end.

We urge both partners to continue to exercise restraint and to utilize fully UNIFIL's liaison capabilities. UNIFIL must be in a position to exercise its mandate to the fullest extent possible. But can we know with certainty that Hizbullah is equally committed to maintaining peace and stability? The answer is no, we cannot. The United States strongly supports Israel's efforts to defend its sovereignty and unconditionally affirms Israel's right to self-defence.

We call on President Michel Aoun and the Lebanese Government to undertake all possible efforts to halt Hizbullah's illicit tunnelling into Israel and to ensure that there is no escalation of tensions or violence. That includes President Aoun directing the Lebanese Armed Forces to act promptly to investigate the suspected starting points of the tunnels. We also call upon UNIFIL to take all the necessary measures to ensure that its area of operations is not used for hostile activities and to ensure that those tunnels do not pose a threat to peace and security. UNIFIL must be provided all possible relevant information, and full access to, the suspected tunnel locations in southern Lebanon, if it is to complete its independent assessment.

The United States strongly supports the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanon. We continue to work with others in the international community to provide assistance to the LAF to allow it to perform its mission as effectively as possible. More broadly, we also call on Iran and its agents to stop their aggressive behaviour and provocation in the region, which pose an unacceptable threat to Israeli and regional security.

We thank UNIFIL for the constructive liaison role the mission has played between the Governments of Lebanon and Israel in order to facilitate clear communication, preserve stability along the Blue Line and document these incidents. However, we urge the mission to continue its heightened security posture and visible presence in southern Lebanon and to actively and regularly update the Security Council on this very serious and ongoing issue.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his briefing on the latest developments along the Blue Line.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the outstanding work of the personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), who have shown exceptional capacity to respond in recent days and made it possible to maintain calm along the Blue Line. That is a fact and must be said.

First, I would like to express our serious concerns about the discovery by the Israeli Defense Forces of tunnels entering Israeli territory, which were dug by Hizbullah from Lebanon and confirmed by UNIFIL. We have said it unequivocally and we repeat it — those tunnels constitute a clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006), which calls for the cessation of hostilities along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel. Those activities must stop.

We have expressed our concern to the Lebanese authorities and call on all parties to exercise the utmost caution and restraint. That is imperative, especially in a context where the risk is high of escalation resulting from misunderstandings, misinterpretations, miscalculation and anticipation errors. Maintaining calm along the Blue Line, for which UNIFIL works daily, remains essential for the entire region. It is therefore crucial that both parties respect all the terms of resolution 1701 (2006) and refrain from any provocation. President Aoun announced that the Lebanese authorities had taken on board the gravity of the situation and were ready to

respond appropriately. We encourage them to continue in that direction and to ensure that the Lebanese Armed Forces are able to take action on two key counts: first, in conducting appropriate investigations together with UNIFIL, following the discovery of the tunnels; and, secondly, to maintain calm and avoid any escalation along the Blue Line.

Moving on to my second point, I would like to come back to address the responsiveness of, and efforts undertaken by, UNIFIL since 4 December to independently shed light on this matter. The Force mobilized immediately following the Israeli revelations. It carried out its own independent verification of the situation, making it impossible to call into question its declarations on proven violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and confirming the credibility of those claims. In that regard, I wish to commend the professionalism of the Head of Mission, Major General Stefano Del Col, who was able to fulfil his duties while maintaining the trust of all parties.

UNIFIL has put in place follow-up measures to formally establish the trajectory of the tunnels, and Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix has once again informed us that the Force is ready to use all of the prerogatives at its disposal, while fully respecting its mandate, of course. We call on the Lebanese and Israeli authorities to continue their close cooperation with the Force, as well as their dialogue, particularly within the framework of tripartite meetings, which play a vital role in preventing any escalation of the situation on the ground. It is also important, as I have said, that the Lebanese army have access to the site, with the support of UNIFIL.

In that context, and this is my final point, the swift establishment of a Lebanese Government of balanced national unity remains essential within a deteriorated regional context in order to revitalize the country's institutions, carry out the necessary reforms and ensure the strengthening of the Lebanese State. Recent events highlight that imperative need.

In that context, we welcome the efforts undertaken by the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Saad Hariri, in carrying out those tasks and we encourage all Lebanese parties to work in a spirit of compromise. We reiterate France's commitment to supporting the future Government of Lebanon and the commitments made by the Lebanese authorities with a view to implementing resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), as well as the policy of dissociation. Lebanon's disassociation

from regional conflicts and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries are essential to its stability. We also encourage Lebanon to relaunch its national defence strategy, in line with President Aoun's statements. Finally, it is important that the Government devote itself to the reforms that Lebanon needs and that the Lebanese people expect, especially with regard to its economy.

We will continue to support the Lebanese Armed Forces through our contingent in UNIFIL and within the framework of the announcements made at the Rome II conference. We also remain fully committed to supporting Lebanon's stability through our economic support, following the CEDRE conference, held on 6 April.

In order to confront this situation, our response should be twofold: in the immediate future, we must ensure calm and shed light on the tunnels that have been uncovered, by cooperating with the Lebanese authorities and UNIFIL in order to continue the investigative work; and in the longer term, we must continue to provide support, along with our international partners, to the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Lebanese State in order to enable them to meet the critical challenge of controlling the entire Lebanese territory and stabilizing the Blue Line. It is essential that the Council remain united in order to contribute to those two objectives. The Council can count on France's full commitment to that end.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing today, his second one on this topic in less than a week. We also thank the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and all staff and force personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We particularly thank the Force Commander, Major General Stefano Del Col, for his efforts to contain the current crisis and avoid any further escalation in the region.

We also commend the Lebanese Government for its efforts aimed at managing and resolving the crisis since its emergence. The President of the Lebanese Republic, General Michel Aoun, declared that Lebanon remained committed to addressing the problem and eliminating its causes, especially so that the crisis does not realistically pose a genuine threat to peace and security in the region. The President further stated that

he remained committed to implementing the provisions set out in resolution 1701 (2006) and to maintaining stability in the south of the country, while rejecting any practices that could lead to further escalation on the border.

Lebanon has been experiencing continuous Israeli provocations for many decades, the last of which is Israel's attempt to exaggerate the current incident through the media and at the political and even military levels by threatening to use military means to destroy the tunnels. Meanwhile, Israel's violations of Lebanese sovereignty continue unabated almost daily.

Today's debate provides us with an opportunity to address the dangerous reality that Lebanon is facing, as Israeli violations continue to increase and intensify. The Israeli army continues to commit violations, disregarding the safety of civilians and the fragile stability of the region. Unfortunately, the constant calls of the international community and the attempts of UNIFIL have failed to put an end to those violations. If the recent activities of the Israeli air force are anything to go by, then we can fully expect those violations to increase in the near future.

The provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) and, more important, Lebanese sovereignty, are being violated almost on a daily basis, as proven by the figures and images provided by the Lebanese Government and the reports of the Secretary-General. However, there have been no calls for the convening of an emergency meeting to discuss those Israeli violations, which we believe are much more threatening than the topic of today's debate. There is all the more reason to convene many open debates to discuss those Israeli violations. For instance, there have been 550 air space violations committed by Israel over the past four months alone, totalling 2,000 flying hours.

The Israeli violations have not been limited to that. There have also been electronic monitoring and espionage activities by Israel, using its infrastructure along the Blue Line and devices it placed on Lebanese territory. A telecommunications war has been waged by Israel against Lebanon, with an increase in the number of telecommunications towers and monitoring devices put in place to spy on the Lebanese network, thereby violating the privacy of Lebanese citizens.

We reiterate our condemnation of Israeli acts of aggression against Lebanese sovereignty by land, air and sea. We emphasize our support for Lebanon's call

on the international community to implement resolution 1701 (2006), based on resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), thereby putting an end to Israel's violations and its continuous threats to Lebanon and Lebanese civil facilities and infrastructure. In that regard, I refer to the statement issued this morning by the Lebanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs that renews its steadfast position of being committed to the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Israeli violations we referred to did not include its biggest violation, which is the ongoing occupation of Lebanese territory. We stress Lebanon's legitimate right to end the occupation and have its territory restored, including the Shaba'a farmlands, the Lebanese Kfar Shuba hills and the Lebanese part of Al-Ghajar village. Lebanon has the right to resist any aggression through legitimate means. We also must make the distinction between terrorism and legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation, which is a right as set out in international charters and in the principles of international law. Resistance is not considered a terrorist act.

Although there is no permanent ceasefire primarily because Israel insists on continuing its violations, we welcome the continuous détente in UNIFIL's area of operations, which is made possible as a result of the close cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL towards the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). That is clearly demonstrated by the increasing number of their joint patrols. We call on all parties to use current channels, including the Tripartite Committee, to address all concerns and problems along the borders. We also call on parties to continue their cooperation and coordination within that Committee in order to overcome any differences that could lead to armed confrontations. In that regard, we commend the achievements of the Lebanese Armed Forces during the past period, both along the Blue Line and throughout Lebanon.

We welcome the Lebanese army's efforts to continuously enhance security along the borders by asserting the authority of the Government over all the territories of Lebanon. Those efforts would assist the Lebanese Government in honouring Lebanon's international commitments, including those made at the Rome II conference to support the Lebanese army and the Paris conference to support the Lebanese economy. Both conferences reaffirmed the international community's commitment to the stability and prosperity

of Lebanon. We renew our support to the Lebanese Government in order to continue its disassociation policy and avert any conflict in the region pursuant to Baabda Declaration.

In conclusion, we renew Kuwait's full solidarity with Lebanon, while providing our political and economic support to its Government and all its constitutional institutions, towards safeguarding the national unity, security, stability and sovereignty of Lebanon over all its territories.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to join other colleagues in thanking Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his briefing.

I would also like to join other colleagues in making clear that the United Kingdom also condemns Hizbullah's building of tunnels leading into Israel. As others have noted, that is a clear violation by Hizbullah of resolution 1701 (2006). It threatens Israel's security, Lebanon's security and regional stability. We are clear that Israel has the right to defend itself against Hizbullah and all other armed militia groups that put its security at risk. All Israelis and all Lebanese have the right to live in peace without fear for their security. As other speakers have noticed, we have witnessed for too long Hizbullah's blatant disregard for the resolutions of the United Nations. Its continued possession of weapons outside of the control of the Lebanese State, reported attempts to acquire dangerous new missile capabilities and its statements that threaten Israel remain deeply alarming. Without an end to Hizbullah's illegal activities in Lebanon and the region, we will continue to see regional stability threatened.

The United Kingdom recognizes the important work that has been carried out over the past 12 years by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to maintain calm and stability along the Blue Line. We pay tribute to those nations that have provided commanders and troops to UNIFIL throughout that period. And the existence of the tunnels reinforces the importance of ensuring that UNIFIL's mandate is effective, strong and has full access to all its areas of operation. We condemn any attempts to restrict UNIFIL's freedom of movement. We recognize that there is the question of access to private property in the context of investigating where the tunnels are. We recognize that that can be difficult, but it is not impossible to resolve this issue. We look forward to a workable solution being found. We welcome the response of UNIFIL and its actions

to monitor the situation and maintain calm, including by deploying additional troops and liaison teams to sensitive locations along the Blue Line. It is vitally important for UNIFIL to continue to liaise closely with the Lebanese and Israeli authorities.

We call on the Lebanese State, and in particular the Lebanese Armed Forces — as the sole and legitimate defenders of Lebanon — working closely with UNIFIL, to take appropriate action, as a matter of urgency, to neutralize the tunnels. We encourage Israel to continue to share with UNIFIL, to the fullest extent possible, any information that would assist UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking action. Where there are difficulties, we urge all parties to work together constructively to overcome them. It is not in the interest of either of the sides for this situation to escalate.

The United Kingdom has been clear on many occasions in the Council that it condemns Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty — whether by land, sea or air. Such actions undermine confidence and stability. And we call for all the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), to be respected in full. In that regard, the United Kingdom welcomes the commitments made both by Israel and Lebanon, including the recent statement by the Lebanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs regarding the full implementation of the latter resolution, the refusal to accept any violations and respect for the Blue Line. Finally, the United Kingdom calls on all sides to continue to abide by their commitments and to avoid actions and rhetoric that could destabilize the situation and the region.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for this morning's update on Lebanon. The recent developments along the Blue Line are indeed worrisome, as they threaten Israel's territorial integrity and Lebanon's stability.

We are deeply concerned about the discovery of tunnels on Israeli territory. We note that a total of four tunnels have been identified and that those tunnels were built from the Lebanese side. Tunnels crossing the Israeli-Lebanese border are a clear violation resolution 1701 (2006). It is important that further technical investigations now be conducted independently and in accordance with the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Lebanese authorities must ensure urgent follow-up actions in accordance with their responsibilities pursuant to

resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL's monitoring and reports of violations of the resolution are crucial, and the Security Council should be kept informed. We condemn all violations of resolution 1701 (2006) by both sides, including the almost-daily Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace.

We call on all parties now to show restraint and de-escalate tensions. UNIFIL plays an important role in sustaining peace in Lebanon and in the region as a whole. We welcome that UNIFIL has now stepped up its efforts to preserve stability, and we emphasize the importance of UNIFIL's close cooperation with both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israeli Defense Forces. It is crucial to avoid any misunderstandings that could lead to escalation. We therefore encourage the parties to make full use of UNIFIL liaison, coordination and tripartite mechanisms in the de-escalation of any tensions.

The paramilitary capabilities of Hizbullah remain a clear risk to the stability of Lebanon and elsewhere. The provisions in resolution 1559 (2004) must be swiftly implemented, including the provision on the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

We welcome positive signs that a Lebanese Government is to be formed soon. That is needed for Lebanon to be able to take steps towards a politically and economically stable and secure future. We welcome President Aoun's renewed commitment to developing a national defence strategy once a Government is formed. We encourage political leaders to support the President in that endeavour. Building the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces is important and requires an increased focus. We strongly encourage continued efforts in this regard, including in the maritime sector, to enable an incremental and controlled reduction of UNIFIL's naval component in future. We also encourage increased efforts to ensure that the LAF model regiment in southern Lebanon becomes operational as soon as possible.

There is full unity in support of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, as demonstrated by the high-level held conferences in Rome, Paris and Brussels earlier this year. The international community must now continue to assist Lebanon in delivering on its commitments and build on the results of those conferences. Lebanon must stay on its path towards stability and peace. This

is important not only for Lebanon, but for the entire region.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First of all, we thank Mr. Lacroix for his detailed briefing. Let me also at the outset express our appreciation for the work that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been doing since the discovery of the tunnels. We especially commend the able leadership of Force Commander Major General Del Col.

We had a chance to discuss this matter in closed consultations last week, so let me reiterate three points today: first, our condemnation of the tunnels; secondly, appreciation of UNIFIL's role and the necessary steps forward; and, thirdly, the need for a sustainable solution.

First, on the Hizbullah tunnels, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is very concerned about the discovery of four tunnels — constructed by Hizbullah — on the northern Israeli border with Lebanon. We strongly condemn these tunnel activities, which are part of Hizbullah's illegal and destabilizing activities in Lebanon and in the region. Hizbullah's actions are a flagrant violation of Israeli sovereignty and international law, such as laid down in resolution 1701 (2006). These tunnels pose a serious threat to regional stability.

We recognize the Israeli right to defend itself, within the limits of international law, and we underline that Israel's concerns for its security are legitimate. We support the Israeli response in destroying these tunnels, which cross into Israeli territory on the Israeli side of the Blue Line. It is clear that these tunnels must be taken seriously by the international community and by the Council in particular.

This brings me to my second point, on UNIFIL's role and the necessary steps forward. We deeply appreciate and support UNIFIL's role and proactive actions since the discovery of the tunnels. UNIFIL has been checking the tunnels on the Israeli side and has concluded so far that two of the four tunnels indeed cross the Blue Line, violating resolution 1701 (2006).

UNIFIL has been able to decrease tensions. In doing so, the tripartite mechanism has again proved its added value. UNIFIL has also been in close contact with the Lebanese authorities. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have sent a very clear message on the need for an investigation on the northern side of the Blue Line.

In our view, the following steps forward are needed.

As a first step, the Lebanese Government and the LAF must take this issue very seriously and act responsibly. It has now been more than two weeks since the discovery of the first tunnel, so an investigation of the alleged starting points of the tunnels on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line is urgently needed. We welcome the announced willingness of the Lebanese Government to cooperate and allow access to the alleged starting points of the tunnels. We call on the Lebanese Government to make good on its commitment. The inspections should be carried out as soon as possible by the LAF, in close cooperation with UNIFIL. We look forward to further information and a conclusion of the investigations by UNIFIL.

The second step is the need for full respect for resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). Although the current situation is relatively calm and escalation has been prevented so far, violations on both sides of the Blue Line remain frequent. We therefore call upon both sides to maintain this calm by fully respecting and implementing both resolutions.

My third point on the need for a sustainable solution is that in our view, the current situation reaffirms the need for such a solution. This would include, first, the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon without further delay; secondly, the development of a national defence strategy in Lebanon; and, thirdly, a clear recommitment to the full implementation of the dissociation policy by the Lebanese Government. In that context, Hizbullah should end its illegal and destabilizing activities.

This must be combined with continued international support for Lebanon, including for the much-needed socioeconomic reforms and in building up the Lebanese Armed Forces.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to do its part in assisting Lebanon on this path. My Government has engaged in a long-term partnership with that beautiful country, and we will continue to do our utmost to be a true friend to the Lebanese people.

Mr. Lie Cheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like at the outset to thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

The stability of the situation in Lebanon is conducive to promoting overall peace and stability in the region. China calls on all relevant parties in Lebanon to continue strengthening dialogue and cooperation and

enhancing unity. China commends Lebanon's efforts to advance the process of cabinet formation.

China is following closely developments along the Blue Line and has taken note of the actions pertaining to the construction of tunnels. We hope that the countries concerned will work closely with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to conduct a comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation. China appreciates the rapid response by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL in undertaking active coordination and communication with the parties concerned, with a view to maintaining regional stability.

Given the current situation, China calls on Lebanon and Israel to remain calm and exercise restraint so as to prevent any escalation of tensions. The two sides should focus on maintaining regional peace and stability, stop the accusatory rhetoric, abide in earnest by the cessation-of-hostilities agreement and strictly implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The international community should respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries concerned and continue to support Lebanon in building its security capacity and border-control capabilities.

The parties must refrain from unilateral actions so as not to exacerbate the situation. The Security Council should exert a positive influence aimed at promoting the use of dialogue and consultation by Lebanon and Israel so that they can properly address their differences.

UNIFIL continues to play an important role in maintaining overall calm in the mission area along the Blue Line, for which China expresses its appreciation. UNIFIL should continue to give full play to the role of the tripartite mechanism in promoting strengthened dialogue between Israel and Lebanon in order to ease the current tense situation. As one of the countries contributing troops to UNIFIL, China will continue to fully support the work of the mission.

China stands ready and willing to work with the international community to continue to play a constructive role in the maintenance of regional peace and stability.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his insightful briefing on developments concerning the tunnels along the Blue Line. The tunnels identified are a clear violation

of resolution 1701 (2006), and we are glad to hear today they are being disabled. We are convinced that United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) technical teams should carry out thorough inspections south of the Blue Line in order to prevent any similar activity in that area in future.

We appreciate the efforts of UNIFIL Force Commander Del Col to de-escalate the situation on the border between Lebanon and Israel. We appreciate also the meetings held with Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Speaker Nabih Berri in Beirut. We are pleased to hear that the overall situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remains calm and that the mission is working with all interlocutors to maintain overall stability. We must therefore further support the efforts of United Nations peacekeeping forces to monitor the situation along the Blue Line. They must have full access to all locations along that Line. We also appeal to all parties to tone down the rhetoric.

UNIFIL peacekeepers should further increase their patrolling along the Blue Line, together with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), so as to maintain overall stability and avoid any misunderstandings that could lead to escalation. We request that the Force Commander be in close liaison with both the LAF and the Israeli Defense Forces. All parties should therefore make use of UNIFIL's dialogue, coordination and tripartite mechanisms in de-escalating tensions.

We join others in urging all the parties to prevent violations of the Blue Line under any circumstances. The Lebanese army should continue to expand the State's sovereignty and control throughout the country and try to maintain a permanent ceasefire. Both Tel Aviv and Beirut should strictly comply with all the relevant Security Council resolutions and assist the United Nations peacekeeping forces with their mandate. Kazakhstan supports Lebanon's territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence, provided for in the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Lebanon of 23 March 1949, and based on paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). We condemn Israel's numerous and continuing violations of Lebanon's territorial integrity, which must cease immediately. We reaffirm Israel's right to protection, but at the same time Israel must observe the established borders and other demarcation lines.

We were pleased to learn that UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for

Lebanon are continuing to engage with the Lebanese authorities in order to ensure the appropriate follow-up to the Rome II conference, held in March, which in turn will ensure Lebanon's commitment to increasing the strength and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations by deploying its model regiment and building the Lebanese navy's capacity.

Lastly, these noteworthy measures must continue and be supported by the Council and the wider international community. Kazakhstan is keen to make a real contribution, so two months ago we deployed a peacekeeping contingent to UNIFIL. As our term is coming to an end, this is the last time that Kazakhstan will address this issue as a Council member. Let me assure the Council that our commitment to this agenda item will be steadfast as we continue to support the Force Commander and the mission in the future.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of today's meeting and Mr. Lacroix's important briefing.

Peru is carefully monitoring the worrying events that have resulted from the discovery of underground tunnels, allegedly dug by Hizbullah, running beneath the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon. In that regard, we must first acknowledge Israel's legitimate right to defend itself against threats or violations of its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this case we believe that should entail deactivating the tunnels, avoiding further escalations or problematic situations and obtaining explanations and satisfaction of the issue.

We underline how vital it is that both the Lebanese and Israeli authorities fully respect the Blue Line, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). We also stress how important it is that the Lebanese Government exercise full control over its entire territory and that no arms or authority other than those of the Lebanese State itself be permitted, in accordance with the Taif Agreement and the relevant Council resolutions.

We want to highlight the important role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in preventing any potential incidents between the Israeli and Lebanese armed forces while the destruction of all the tunnels is in progress. We have taken note of the UNIFIL investigations confirming the existence of four tunnels, two of which cross under the Blue Line in clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006). We emphasize

the importance of conducting such investigations in an independent and timely manner, as well as ensuring that the Force has adequate resources for that purpose, in addition to the cooperation of the authorities and armed forces of both countries. We also underscore the need for the parties to exercise restraint and, bearing in mind the gravity of the matter in question, reaffirm their commitment to strictly adhering to the Taif Agreement and resolution 1701 (2006), among other things, as well as to fully respecting the Blue Line.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his detailed briefing. We also welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of Israel and of Lebanon in today's meeting.

At the outset, we would like to point out that the Russian Federation has historically maintained friendly, constructive and mutually respectful relations with both Lebanon and Israel. We therefore support both States' right to peaceful development without challenges to their national security or violations of their sovereignty. That is why we firmly believe that maintaining a calm environment on the line of separation between Lebanon and Israel is essential not only to preventing any escalation in the area, but for ensuring stability more broadly. One of our most exemplary missions is deployed along the Blue Line, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose peacekeepers are serving in difficult circumstances, considering the general security crisis in the Middle East. Russia has remained in close contact with both the Lebanese and the Israelis, as well as the United Nations personnel, including with regard to the events currently taking place. With regard to the situation that has developed around the discovery of these tunnels, whose existence UNIFIL confirmed in the past few days, we would chiefly like to focus on the following points.

While we understand everyone's alarm, for the sake of stability we believe that all the parties should refrain from emotional polemics. Right now, it is critical that the parties immediately engage in constructive, professional dialogue aimed at eliminating controversial points. In the Israeli-Lebanon context there are opportunities for that. The existing tripartite mechanism in Naqoura for preventing and resolving incidents works well.

We have also taken into consideration UNIFIL's preliminary conclusions about the violation of

resolution 1701 (2006). Our view is that all violations of the resolution's provisions must cease, on both sides. That means all of them. We cannot have a selective approach to the resolution's implementation. With regard to the Israeli military's launch of its Operation Northern Shield, we naturally recognize Israel's right to defend its national security, including by preventing any illegal penetration of its territory by anyone. However, we hope that the action undertaken in that regard will not run counter to the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) defining the rules of conduct of the parties in the area of the Blue Line, which is not an internationally recognized boundary. The commitments relating to it are mutually binding only between the two parties.

We welcome the clear messages from the leadership of both the States involved signalling that they do not intend to engage in direct confrontation. We heard a similar message in the conversation between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Netanyahu. President Aoun, speaking for the Lebanese side, reaffirmed his commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and expressed his willingness to take all necessary measures to resolve the problem based on the clarification of all the circumstances. We want to emphasize the importance of seeing both parties display a sense of responsibility and restraint and avoid provocative steps and abrasive statements that might further exacerbate an already tense situation in the Middle East.

Separately, we would like to focus on the fact that the tunnel problem should not become a reason for hasty conclusions about the functioning of UNIFIL. The mission should not be subjected to politicized aspirations that have little to do with improving its effectiveness. Any efforts to undermine UNIFIL's capacity would be unacceptable, considering that its peacekeepers' work has a stabilizing effect not only along the Blue Line separating Lebanon and Israel but inside Lebanon itself and in the Middle East generally. We want to emphasize that all disagreements that arise either in the area of the Blue Line or with regard to the agenda item for Lebanon should be addressed through political dialogue and consultations, as every relevant Security Council resolution makes clear. The fact is that what is going on in this part of the Middle East is the result of many years of conflicts, crises and wars. Stabilizing the situation requires the cooperation of the States concerned with a view to increasing trust and relaunching international efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I join the delegations that took the floor before me in thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and in welcoming the presence of Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix and thanking him for the detailed information he has just given us on the most recent developments concerning the current tense situation near the Blue Line.

In view of the confirmation by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) of the existence of tunnels south of the Blue Line and the launching of a large-scale military operation announced by the Israeli armed forces with the aim of destroying several tunnels dug from Lebanon to Israel, the Government of Equatorial Guinea expresses its deep concern about overall stability in the region.

The attribution by the Israeli Defense Forces of the excavation of the tunnels to Hizbullah has sounded the drums of war in Upper Galilee. Tensions are increasing and with them the risk of a miscalculation that could turn into a confrontation between the patrols of the Lebanese army and the Israeli Defense Forces, which are already squaring off against one another in those areas.

Bearing in mind that the tunnels discovered were excavated from homes in Lebanese villages and that, if the genuine intention of their perpetrators was allegedly to use them to infiltrate Israel and launch offensives against the opposing party, the tunnels clearly pose a threat to the security of both the Israeli and Lebanese civilian populations and constitute a flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006), which calls on the parties to uphold a permanent ceasefire along the Blue Line. In that context, my delegation wishes to stress the importance of ensuring stability on the border and the region in strict compliance with resolution 1701 (2006) and in coordination of UNIFIL.

We commend the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Stefano Del Col, on his efforts. He has maintained contact with both sides at the highest level to maintain clear and credible channels of communication in order to avoid misunderstandings on this sensitive issue. We again urge the Lebanese and Israeli authorities to prioritize their close cooperation with UNIFIL and to use the latter's liaison, coordination and tripartite mechanisms to reduce tension.

The responsibility for the security and well-being of the people on both sides of the Blue Line ultimately rests with the Governments of Israel and Lebanon. That is why we believe that, before resorting to force, the priority must be to preserve calm and stability in the region. As has been underscored, the ongoing relative calm that has prevailed along the Blue Line since 2006 is a positive development. Therefore, the continued commitment of all parties to resolution 1701 (2006) remains essential for maintaining stability in the region. We also understand that Israel has the right to legitimate defence.

The message bears repeating: The Government of Equatorial Guinea wants Council members with the capacity to influence the parties to become even more involved in making decisive progress towards a permanent ceasefire. That must be done by prioritizing not only their interests in the region but ultimately the well-being of the people, who often live under the shadow of war or its looming threat.

In conclusion, this is our desire not only because we are a member of the Security Council but also because of our firm conviction that, through political negotiation, the parties concerned can satisfactorily resolve all the problems, including those relating to the Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations, in such a way that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can soon be achieved in the Middle East.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his briefing on the developments in connection with tunnels along the Blue Line. We have also taken note of the white notes we received last week. We understand the seriousness of the matter, which has enormous ramifications for the security and stability of not only Lebanon and Israel, but also of the wider region.

We all know the delicate situation in the region, and it would not be in anyone's interest if it escalated. That is why it is absolutely vital to maintain calm and stability along the Blue Line. It is encouraging to know that both parties are willing to work with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and have no intention to escalate the situation along the Blue line.

We take note of the statement issued by the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander following meetings with the Lebanese President and Speaker of Parliament. The role of UNIFIL continues to be

very vital and the mission needs to be supported in effectively carrying out its mandate. It is also important that UNIFIL continue to work in close coordination with the parties to verify the facts and address the developments in connection with the tunnels, in line with resolution 1701 (2006). We hope the Council will be informed of the outcome of the investigations in due course.

Finally, strengthening the presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout the territory remains an important objective, which needs to be implemented. That is all the more significant in the light of the most recent developments. We support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority across the whole territory.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): At the outset, let me join other colleagues in thanking Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his detailed briefing and in expressing our deep appreciation for the way the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and its leadership have handled this very serious and difficult situation.

We note with great concern the existence, as confirmed by UNIFIL, of tunnels along the Blue Line, which were discovered by the Israeli Defense Forces in northern Israel. Let me echo a number of other delegations that stressed at this meeting that the tunnels constitute a violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The construction of the tunnels is also a violation of Israel's sovereignty and a potential threat to its citizens. It also threatens Lebanese stability.

We commend the swift action by UNIFIL in examining the claims regarding the existence of the tunnels. Let me emphasize UNIFIL's special role under the current circumstances and commend the mission's peacekeepers for their participation in maintaining stability in Lebanon. We also recognize the decisive role of the Lebanese Armed Forces in responding to security challenges.

Poland condemns any actions that may further undermine security and threaten peace in the region. We urge all parties to abide by their legal obligation to respect fully the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) and the mandate of UNIFIL. We urge the parties to show restraint and maintain close contact and cooperation with UNIFIL with a view to preserving calm and stability. Bearing in mind the highly positive role of the tripartite mechanism, any actions should be

consulted between the parties through that platform to prevent an escalation of the conflict. In that context, we call upon all sides to avoid any unilateral actions.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm our strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon and its efforts to insulate itself from the damaging effect of the Syrian conflict.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing today. We renew our support for the work entrusted to him.

We express our full confidence in the follow-up actions initiated by the Lebanese Government at the request of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which has thus far confirmed the existence of four tunnels close to the Blue Line in northern Israel, according to its 17 December press release. We welcome the fact that the construction of those cross-border tunnels between Israel and Lebanon is being thoroughly investigated by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces. The investigation must strictly adhere to the principles set out in paragraph 8 of resolution 1701 (2006).

Bolivia reiterates its emphatic condemnation of any action that results in the violation of the territorial sovereignty of Lebanon or the State of Israel. During the two years we have occupied this seat as an elected member of the Council, we have insisted that both parties must base all their actions on the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), with full respect for the Blue Line. That is why we reject Israel's persistent violations of Lebanese airspace and territory. Israel's presence in the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and the adjacent area, north of the Blue Line, must cease immediately. We also urge the Israeli Government to refrain from the actions it has carried out since 4 December — the excessive mobilization of its defence forces and the use of inflammatory rhetoric, both of which are flagrant violations of resolution 1701 (2016) and Lebanese sovereignty.

The situation on the ground remains relatively calm; there have been no clashes or skirmishes between the military forces on either side. On the contrary, an investigation is ongoing and efforts are being made to maintain clear and credible channels of communication with both parties, so as to avoid misunderstandings that might turn into regrettable situations. We highlight that

both parties have indicated that they have no intention of escalating tensions along the Blue Line and will therefore continue to work with UNIFIL to that end.

We also express our full support for the work of UNIFIL, which in 2019 will continue to support all efforts to defuse tensions through dialogue and seek every opportunity for confidence-building. All parties must be aware of the possibility that a relatively minor incident could quickly become more serious, with unintended consequences.

Therefore, we reiterate our call to the parties to promote the establishment, between the Blue Line and the Litani River, of a zone free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL, with a view to preventing the resumption of hostilities.

My delegation is deeply concerned that, despite Israel's participation in the meeting in Naqoura of the tripartite mechanism of senior officials — together with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL — in which the parties expressed their willingness to honour the provisions set out in resolution 1701 (2006), it continues to flagrantly violate said resolution. Nevertheless, we hope that today's meeting will serve to ensure that calm prevails in the coming weeks.

In conclusion, Bolivia rejects Israel's persistent violations of Lebanese airspace, which are a flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006), and we are convinced that the perpetuation of such illegal actions only generates instability in the region. We urge the Government of Israel to immediately cease its occupation of the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and the adjacent area, north of the Blue Line, as it violates the resolution and, more important, Lebanese sovereignty.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation congratulates Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his excellent briefing on the situation at the border between Israel and Lebanon.

Côte d'Ivoire remains particularly concerned about the recent discovery of tunnels along the Blue Line, the demarcation line between Israel and Lebanon. The discovery of four Hizbullah tunnels could exacerbate tensions between the two countries and hinder the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), of 11 August

2006. The relative calm in that area raised hopes for improved relations between Israel and Lebanon.

My country condemns those Hizbullah actions, which could endanger the lives and well-being of millions of Lebanese citizens who aspire to live in peace, following the trauma caused by the long civil war in Lebanon and the 33-day war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006.

My delegation therefore welcomes the investigation conducted by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) regarding the construction of those tunnels and calls on all stakeholders to exercise restraint pending the outcome of the investigation. In that context, my delegation congratulates Major General Del Col and his troops for their professionalism in the face of this difficult situation. Côte d'Ivoire encourages the Lebanese authorities to provide all the necessary assistance to UNIFIL, including access to private property that might house those tunnels.

In conclusion, my country urges the parties concerned to prioritize dialogue in order to resolve this incident, as a new conflict between Israel and Hizbullah would have dramatic consequences in a region that is, unfortunately, beset by many crises.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): I would like to start by thanking Mr. Lacroix for his briefing and for his support — and that of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) — for peace in Lebanon.

We are meeting during a holy month that is supposed to bring peace to all on Earth. Unfortunately, it seems that my country, Lebanon, is condemned to be the victim of continuous threats, conflict and pain. While the Lebanese were busy preparing for Christmas in order to celebrate the birth of hope and renewal, they are today worried, concerned and fearful about the future. When they see this organ convene to discuss Lebanon, as it is doing today, it triggers memories of Israeli aggression, invasions and continued occupation of Lebanese land. They wonder if all of this is a prelude to another aggression. No one can blame them. Lebanon has witnessed four Israeli invasions in the last 40 years, which resulted in thousands of civilians killed or severely injured, the destruction of the country's infrastructure and years of hardship for the Lebanese

people. We continue to suffer the consequences of those invasions.

Today we are witnessing another volatile situation concerning the tunnels. Lebanon has taken this issue very seriously. It has said — loudly and clearly and at the highest level — that it is not interested in a new conflict. Indeed, immediately after the news came out, President Michel Aoun unequivocally reaffirmed Lebanon's commitment to the letter and spirit of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety. That affirmation was not mere rhetoric or words — it was a commitment that is in the interests of my country and my people. That is also why President Aoun expressed Lebanon's interest in preserving the security and stability of south Lebanon, as well as its willingness to work with the international community to address the issues raised by the Security Council in its most recent meeting on Lebanon (see S/PV.8338). He made it clear that Lebanon has no aggressive intentions.

That same commitment was reiterated by Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri in a meeting where he told UNIFIL's Force Commander, Major General Del Col, that Lebanon remained committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and respect for the Blue Line. The Prime Minister-designate has said that the Lebanese army, the sole power responsible for defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, cooperates with the UNIFIL forces and will conduct patrols to deal with any flaws in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) from the Lebanese side.

Following his statement, the Lebanese army is now deployed heavily in the area of operations to make sure that resolution 1701 (2006) is abided by strictly. The army is continuing its patrols there at this moment. The Foreign Ministry, on its part, in a statement today rejected any violations of resolution 1701 (2006) of any kind. But the President and the Prime Minister-designate also pointed to Israeli's responsibility in instigating conflict through its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty. The real issue at hand is indeed the constant violations of our sovereignty by land, air and sea, in full contravention of resolution 1701 (2006), but also in full contravention of a key provision of Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Lebanese State did not commit any violations, while the violations on the Israeli side were committed

by the Israeli Government, which amount to 1,800 violations annually, and in the last four months they have reached 150 a month, on average. Here is a sample of the violations that we have provided to the United Nations, every day and every week — I am sure they are in the United Nations offices already. These are for the month of December alone, and today is only the nineteenth. Moreover, Israel breached Lebanese airspace in the last four months alone by an average of 84 violations daily. All of those are documented with UNIFIL.

That is in addition to its violation of the Lebanese telecommunications network, sending threatening messages to Lebanese citizens and causing fear and panic among the population. We sent reports of those violations to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, in a formal letter on 6 December. Just imagine, if we were to call for a Security Council meeting every time Israel had violated Lebanon's sovereignty since 2006, the members of the Council would be here 24/7 to address them.

Lebanese officials accorded the problem of the tunnels the utmost careful attention fearing, rightly so, that Israel might use it as a pretext to threaten the stability of Lebanon. The Prime Minister-designate told the UNIFIL Force Commander that the United Nations must shoulder its responsibilities in facing Israel's daily violations. He said that the escalating tone towards Lebanon, which those present had a taste of today outside the Council, does not serve the relative calm that has prevailed for more than 12 years in the south.

Prime Minister Hariri called on the international community and all members to curb this escalation in the interest of respecting the Blue Line and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We repeat his call here again in the Council, with the hope that it will defuse the situation for the benefit of peace and calm on our border.

In the light of all those violations and disregard for international legality, the Lebanese are asking a legitimate question: for the international community, are there aristocrats in committing violations? They are worried about double standards: the Lebanese reports of Israeli violations of its sovereignty are buried in the archives, while Israel's complaints get Security Council meetings and its actions go unpunished.

“We have the perfect right to pre-emptive self-defence, survey and collect intelligence.”

Those are the words of the Prime Minister of Israel a few days ago when addressing the Israeli breaches of Lebanese airspace. What the Prime Minister sees as self-defence is seen as a threat in Beirut. When Israeli planes fly low or break the sound barrier over populated areas, people feel the brunt of the Israeli violations. We all know too well how the so-called Israeli right to pre-emptive self-defence, which, by the way, has no international legal basis, is used to justify illegal aggressive acts and invasions.

We should not be condemned to repeating the same situation over and over again. There is a simple way of keeping the border calm. It is by the adherence to resolution 1701 (2006) by both sides, not only by Lebanon. It is by moving from the cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire. It is by the Israeli withdrawal from the remaining occupied Lebanese territory and territorial waters.

There is also a United Nations mechanism in south Lebanon, as members have mentioned, the Tripartite Committee, which can deal with all the issues that arise from the situation in south Lebanon. That Committee can be empowered to solve all the violations, especially the outstanding issues of the border dispute between Lebanon and Israel, including the maritime border. Those issues can be resolved away from any domestic political considerations.

The Israeli press is rife with questions about the timing and purpose of this Israeli campaign. But, although Lebanon is not concerned with Israel's domestic policy, it refuses to be used as a pawn in Israeli power politics. Lebanon is interested in preserving calm within its territory and living in peace and security. Is that too much to ask for?

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Imagine a crisp fall morning in northern Israel, in Metulla, where farmers are working in their fields, boys and girls are walking to school, neighbours are wishing each other a good morning and everyone is going about their day. Metulla is surrounded by the Lebanese border, but the town lives in calm and quiet, until the terror starts.

Suddenly, a force of 250 Hizbullah terrorists, from the elite Radwan Unit, emerge from the end of a cross-

border terror tunnel. That tunnel spans from Kafr Kila, Lebanon, directly into Metulla, Israel. It was built to enable that large group of Hizbullah terrorists to move swiftly across the border underground. The tunnels are wide enough for Radwan terrorists to march two by two into Israel. Hizbullah Radwan forces will use that tunnel to invade Israel and take over Metulla. Its terrorists will kill civilians, including children and the elderly. Then it will close the Route 90, which is the highway that connects Metulla with the rest of the Galilee, and hold Metulla under siege.

But now imagine that tragic scenario multiplied five times over. Imagine Hizbullah's Radwan terrorists using five different tunnels to five other towns in Israel — Kiryat Shmona, Avivim, Adamit, Zar'it and Menara — and killing innocent Israeli civilians, kidnapping them and taking over parts of the Galilee. Hizbullah calls that strategic operational plan "Conquering the Galilee". It is a ground attack, but Hizbullah does not stop there. It shoots thousands of rockets and missiles into northern Israel. It launches anti-tank missiles that could easily hit a bus full of children. It seizes control of northern Israel's major roads and highways. It uses Shiite militias together with the Radwan forces to cross the Blue Line into Israel, overcome obstacles Israel has set in their way and launch terror attacks against Israel by sea.

What I just described is not just a figment of the imagination. But we will never allow that to happen. Through an extensive intelligence operation, Israel monitored Hizbullah's widespread terror tunnel project, which spans from Lebanon into Israel's sovereign territory, underneath the Blue Line.

On 4 December, Israel initiated Operation Northern Shield. That operation is a protective measure to prevent the possibility of such a grave reality from ever taking place. It is a pre-emptive logistical operation on our side of the Blue Line. The goal remains to neutralize and destroy Hizbullah's terror tunnels. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has reported the existence so far of four terror tunnels in four separate geographical locations that begin in Lebanon and infiltrate Israel. Israel has informed its partners about the extensive operation and provided the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with full information about the tunnels. Throughout it all, Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, has remained silent.

UNIFIL confirmed the existence of those terror tunnels two days ago. UNIFIL stated clearly that Hizbullah's activities constitute a violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and are a matter of serious concern. Israel transferred all of the information to UNIFIL. We even provided the exact coordinates of the opening of the tunnels on the Lebanese side. What did we expect UNIFIL to do with that information? We expected it would, perhaps, take control of the area, destroy the tunnels and follow its mandate. But what did UNIFIL do? It passed all of the information to the Lebanese army. The Lebanese army could have worked with UNIFIL to remove Hizbullah completely from the area or, perhaps, destroy the tunnels and done its job to keep its people safe. But, what did the Lebanese army do? It sent the information directly to Hizbullah, which then sealed the tunnels and tried to cover up the evidence. Here is a picture we took inside one of the Hizbullah terror-attack tunnels on our side. As Council members can see, Hizbullah placed a fence and bricks inside the tunnel in an attempt to hide it. We do not expect that Hizbullah would receive information and immediately send terrorists to block the tunnel.

UNIFIL has one primary responsibility and, according to its mandate, that is

"to ensure that its area of operations it not utilized for hostile activities of any kind" (*resolution 1701 (2006), para. 12*).

Israel has revealed to UNIFIL that Mayor Yahya Husseini, a high-ranking member of the Lebanese army, is using his position to advance the interests of Hizbullah. That is not the first instance of cooperation between the terrorist group and the Lebanese army. Husseini is part of a liaison network between the Lebanese army and Hizbullah. The Lebanese army has even promoted him.

The Lebanese Armed Forces, the so-called official military of Lebanon, is supposed to ensure calm and stability in the region. In southern Lebanon there are 10,000 soldiers of the Lebanese Armed Forces. They, along with more than 11,000 UNIFIL peacekeepers, have one objective: to prevent Hizbullah from terrorizing the area. Yet, somehow, Hizbullah, with fewer than 10,000 terrorists, has full control of the area. The Lebanese army has chosen to walk with Hizbullah in two ways — by giving Hizbullah information that helps the terror group's efforts and by preventing UNIFIL from carrying out its mandate in the region.

We are very concerned, but not surprised, to hear that the Lebanese army does not give UNIFIL full access to the coordinates provided by Israel or stop Hizbullah from confronting UNIFIL forces on the ground.

Let me be abundantly clear. Hizbullah's activities are a flagrant and unacceptable violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the Blue Line. They also violate the Charter of the United Nations and international law. In order for the new UNIFIL Force Commander, Major General Del Col, to succeed — and we want him to succeed in his role — UNIFIL cannot make the same mistakes made under the previous Commander. Israel has informed UNIFIL time and again of Hizbullah's terror activities, but they have never appeared in the 38 reports on resolution 1701 (2006). I repeat, 38 reports.

I have exposed Hizbullah's violations here in the Security Council. In June 2017, I visited the northern border with Major General Beary, the former UNIFIL Force Commander, together with IDF officials. On that day he said,

“The region is calm. The situation is good. There is no need for change.”

Today no one can deny the facts. In this picture Council members can see the tunnel crossing the Blue Line, almost directly under a UNIFIL observation point. There is a UNIFIL observation point just metres from the tunnel. When a terror-attack tunnel runs from a private property and under the Blue Line, the region is not calm. The situation is not good. There must be a change.

UNIFIL could not even enter certain sections of its own mandated area of operations. It must be granted full access to its entire area of operations, including the private properties and nature reserves that Hizbullah is exploiting for terror. We know that it is a game. For example, Hizbullah has conducted operations under the guise of a mock non-governmental organization, known as Green without Borders. Those present here today have seen those operations with their own eyes. Israel calls on UNIFIL to carry out its full mandate under resolution 2433 (2017) and maintain regional security. The world has expectations of UNIFIL that it must meet. The Security Council must designate Hizbullah as a terrorist organization, just as it designated the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and the Taliban. The international community must condemn Hizbullah in the strongest terms and stand by Israel's self-defence measures. It is the expectation that Lebanon will

eliminate the terror tunnels and prevent the building of future attack tunnels that threaten Israel. Israel will continue Operation Northern Shield to neutralize the threat of the tunnels. We have the full right, like any other nation in the world, to defend ourselves, our sovereignty and our people.

Hizbullah's severe violations of resolution 1701 (2006) do not end with its terror-tunnel project. Unfortunately, the terror tunnels reflect just a small part of Hizbullah's illegal activities in southern Lebanon. Hizbullah is building military capabilities and infrastructure with the ultimate goal of using them to attack Israel. Let us take one village, for example — Kfar Kila, a Lebanese town of close to 15,000 people next to our border. Houses have been turned into bunkers and schools have become weapons-storage facilities. I told the Ambassador of Lebanon to look at what he has allowed Hizbullah to do in southern Lebanon. Why is he putting his own people in danger? Not only is Hizbullah violating resolution 1701 (2006); it is also exploiting the innocent civilians of southern Lebanon by using them as human shields.

I will share evidence of that with the Council. We are revealing this information for the first time. This is Kafr Kile. In this aerial photo the Council can see the complete transformation of this village into a terror terminal. All the dots are bunkers storing weapons. Here we can see where the tunnels start in the village. These are private properties. Hizbullah has built a terror terminal from Kafr Kile into Israel, which stores weaponry and builds command-and-control centres. That is the reality. Imagine what will happen to the village in case we have to defend ourselves.

Hizbullah has also established the foundation for launching attacks against Israel, using homes as command-and-control centres, turning civilian and private infrastructure into weapons armouries and building elaborate operational capabilities inside villages and forests. Those violations reflect just the backdrop of Hizbullah's illegal activities in southern Lebanon. Hizbullah has stockpiled thousands of rockets and missiles within those areas. That is the reality on the ground. What does the international community honestly expect Israel to do in the face of that grave danger?

The Lebanese Ambassador called for condemning Israel. We appreciate her concern for the Lebanese people, especially in Kafr Kile. As she mentioned in

her letter to the Council on 6 December, she represents a Government that allows Iran and its proxies to turn Lebanon into a launching pad for terror. The Lebanese Government is endangering its own people by simply doing nothing. How have they allowed Hizbullah to build an underground city of tunnels that places the citizens of Lebanon in constant danger? There are no expectations from a terrorist organization to act appropriately. But what has the Lebanese Government done to prevent Hizbullah from triggering a regional war? Hizbullah is hijacking the entire State of Lebanon to attack Israel, and the Government of Lebanon has surrendered. By closing its eyes as its people live inside a ticking time bomb of terror tunnels, missiles and rockets, the Government of Lebanon has failed its people.

Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, revealed that Hizbullah has placed at least three precision missile conversion sites directly beside Beirut's international airport. Hizbullah is building its own precision missile production capabilities. Hizbullah is now holding over 100,000 rockets and missiles across Lebanon. One may wonder how Hizbullah, a terrorist organization, could get away with that. The answer is simple. First, Hizbullah is now more than ever paralysing and eroding the pillars of the State of Lebanon with its ever-growing grip on power. Secondly, there is Iran. Nasrallah said himself:

“We are open about the fact that Hizbullah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, come from the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Iran is the lifeblood of Hizbullah, ideologically, financially, militarily and even culturally. Based

on growing evidence and reports, Iran is not only transferring game-changing weapons through Lebanon's border with Syria but, in flagrant violation of numerous Security Council resolutions, Iran is now transporting those weapons on commercial planes landing in Beirut's international airport. After the joint campaign of killing in Syria, Iranian fighters, Shiite militias and Hizbullah terrorists — specifically the Radwan Unit — are joining forces once again — this time against Israel.

Let me be crystal clear before I conclude: if Hizbullah makes the mistake of attacking Israel, opposing our actions or violating our sovereignty — make no mistake — Israel will act. We will act swiftly. We will act by land, by air and by sea. We will act with our full force and might.

If there is a war that must be fought for Israel to defend itself against Hizbullah's terrorism the world would say, as it always does, how could this have been prevented? Well, today even that future war could have been prevented with this body acting as it is charged to do: by calling out the flagrant violations of international law and acting finally and decisively.

Israel is protecting itself. Operation Northern Shield ensures the safety of our people. Israel has no intention to escalate the situation, but we are not naïve. As the famous playwright Anton Chekhov once said, if you place a gun in the first act, it must fire in the last. Hizbullah's terror tunnels and missiles were not created without purpose. They were created for Hizbullah to use against us. If Hizbullah will have the arrogance to attack Israel, we will bury it in the rubble of Lebanon. We will never let terror win.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.