



# Security Council

Seventy-seventh year

*Provisional*

**8950**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 19 January 2022, 10 a.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Ms. Huitfeldt . . . . .	(Norway)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Costa Filho
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
	Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Botchwey
	India . . . . .	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter by the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of Security Council members dated 7 May 2020 (S/2020/372), which was agreed in light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this official record of the Security Council will be supplemented by a compilation of annexes (S/2022/39) containing the statements submitted by interested non-members of the Council.



*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Bahrain, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Ms. Nada Majdalani, Palestine Director of EcoPeace Middle East; and Mr. Gidon Bromberg, co-Founder and Israel Director of EcoPeace Middle East.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Arrmanatha Christiawan Nasir, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

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

Before we begin with our speakers list today — recalling the Security Council's latest note by the President (S/2017/507) on its working methods — I wish to encourage all speakers, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver

their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and focus on key issues. In that spirit, briefers are further encouraged to limit their initial remarks to seven to 10 minutes. Everyone is also encouraged to wear a mask at all times, including while delivering remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** In my recent briefings, I have highlighted the ongoing deterioration of the economic, security and political situation across the occupied Palestinian territory. Regrettably, that trend continues, and urgent steps are required to prevent the situation from worsening.

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) fiscal situation continues to be dire, threatening its institutional stability and its ability to provide services to its people. Violence continues unabated across the occupied Palestinian territory, including settler violence, leading to numerous Palestinian and Israeli casualties and increasing the risk of a broader escalation. Settlement activity, demolitions and evictions also continue, fuelling hopelessness and further diminishing prospects for a negotiated solution.

We must be frank about what is needed to reverse those trends and provide momentum towards a reinvigorated peace process. Piecemeal approaches and half measures will only ensure that the underlying issues perpetuating the conflict continue to fester and worsen over time. Unilateral steps and conflict drivers must stop. Political and economic reforms must be implemented to ensure the PA's continued ability to function effectively, while boosting donor confidence and support.

Above all, efforts by the parties and the international community to stabilize and improve conditions on the ground should be linked to a political framework.

Without a realistic prospect of an end to the occupation and the realization of a two-State solution based on United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements, it is only a matter of time before we face an irreversible, dangerous collapse and widespread instability.

Daily violence continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period. In Gaza on 29 December, a Palestinian opened fire towards the Gaza perimeter fence, injuring an Israeli civilian. In retaliation, Israeli forces fired several tank

shells at what they said were Hamas observation posts in the northern Gaza Strip. Four Palestinian civilians were reportedly injured, including a 16-year-old boy.

On 1 January, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that two rockets fired from Gaza had landed off the coast of central Israel. Israeli forces subsequently carried out air strikes against what they said were facilities belonging to militant groups in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

In the occupied West Bank, six Palestinian men were killed by Israeli security forces, and another died in unclear circumstances in the context of demonstrations, clashes, search and arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, as well as in other incidents. Two hundred and forty-nine Palestinians, including four women and 46 children, were injured.

Settlers and other Israeli civilians perpetrated 28 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in six injured and damage to property. Two Palestinians were killed under unclear circumstances involving Israeli civilian vehicles. In all, Palestinians perpetrated some 89 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians, resulting in 15 Israeli civilians injured and damage to property in clashes, shootings, stabbings and ramming attacks, as well as incidents involving the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents. Five members of the Israeli security forces were also injured.

On 29 December, a Palestinian man who reportedly attempted to carry out a ramming attack against Israeli security forces near the Mevo Dotan settlement, in the northern West Bank, was killed by Israeli security forces.

On 22 December, a Palestinian man was killed by Israeli security forces near the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah. According to Israeli security forces, the man had opened fire from a vehicle at Israeli forces conducting a search and arrest operation in the area.

On 31 December, a Palestinian man reportedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack against Israeli soldiers and civilians near the village of Salfit. He was shot by Israeli security forces and later succumbed to his wounds.

On 6 January, a 21-year-old Palestinian man was killed during armed exchanges with Israeli security forces as he conducted a search and arrest operation in the Balata refugee camp, near Nablus in Area A.

On 5 January, a tow truck under supervision by Israeli police hit and severely injured a 70-year-old Palestinian activist man in Un Al-Khail, south of Hebron, during a police operation to confiscate unregistered vehicles. The man subsequently died from his injuries on 17 January. Police reported that a driver was injured in the head by stones thrown at him and required medical attention.

On 12 January, an 80-year-old Palestinian man died in the context of an Israeli security forces operation near Ramallah, in which the victim was reportedly handcuffed, blindfolded and physically assaulted by the security forces. According to the IDF, the man was released alive. I note that Israeli authorities have initiated an investigation and called for a swift, thorough and transparent outcome.

On 17 January, Israeli security forces reported that a Palestinian man attempted to stab an IDF soldier with a knife near Hebron. Israeli security forces shot and killed the alleged assailant. No injuries were reported among the Israeli security forces. Another Palestinian who had been driving the vehicle of the alleged assailant later turned himself in to the Israeli security forces.

Settler-related violence remained a serious concern throughout the reporting period. From 23 to 25 December 2021, 156 Palestinians were injured by rubber bullets from Israeli forces and 15 from live ammunition in confrontations that erupted in and around Burqa, near Nablus, after settlers repeatedly raided the village, vandalized property and clashed with the local residents. That occurred as part of settler protests against the killing of an Israeli settler in that area on 16 December 2021 and demands to re-establish the adjacent settlement of Homesh, which had been officially evacuated in 2005.

On several occasions during reporting period, Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers clashed in the context of efforts by the security forces to dismantle unauthorized structures set up by Israeli settlers in Homesh and other outposts, which are also illegal under Israeli law. All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and brought swiftly to justice.

Turning to settlement-related developments, on 5 January Israeli authorities postponed a planned discussion on objections to two plans for some 3,500 housing units in the controversial E-1 Area on the West Bank. A new date for the discussion has not been set. The same day, Israeli authorities published tenders for

some 300 settlement housing units in the Talpote East neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem.

On 10 January, the Israeli District Planning Committee advanced a plan, pending revision, to build some 800 housing units in place of an existing 182 units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Gilo. On 17 January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a plan for some 1,200 housing units next to Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, in the southern Jerusalem area, a significant number of which are intended for construction across the Green Line in East Jerusalem. I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activities immediately.

Israeli authorities demolished, seized and forced owners to demolish 54 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and 23 in occupied East Jerusalem, thereby displacing 102 Palestinians, including 26 women and 47 children. The demolitions were carried out due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

On 19 January, Israeli forces evicted a Palestinian family and demolished their home in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, which displaced 12 Palestinians and reportedly resulted in a number of arrests. According to the Jerusalem Municipality, the structures were built illegally in recent years and the land was cleared to build a special needs school to serve Palestinian children from East Jerusalem.

I remain concerned about the potential eviction of a number of Palestinian families from homes in which they have lived for decades in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem and the risk that such actions pose for escalating violence. I call on Israeli authorities to end the displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international law, and to approve additional plans that would enable Palestinian communities to build legally and address their development needs.

On 28 December 2021, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met with Israeli Defence Minister Benjamin Gantz for the second time in four months. Following the meeting, Israel announced several measures, including updating the registration of some 9,500 Palestinians on the West Bank in Gaza, an advance of 100 million Israeli shekels against the

clearance revenue that Israel collects on behalf of the PA and additional entry permits for Palestinian officials and businessmen. I welcome the ongoing high-level engagement between Israel and Palestinian officials and the recent steps that have been announced. I urge both sides to continue to expand that engagement to end past underlying political issues.

Following the designation by Israel of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations, the United Nations continues to engage with all relevant parties to receive more information about the allegations and their implications.

On 12 January, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission concluded voter registration for a second phase of local council elections, scheduled for 26 March. However, on 17 January, the Palestinian Cabinet postponed local council elections in Gaza over procedural disputes. On 14 January, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the most recent political developments and the situation on the ground.

Turning to Gaza, during the month of January Israeli authorities completed the issuance of permits to approximately 10,000 Gazan merchants and traders — some 12,000 total approved permits, the highest number in years. I welcome the stated willingness of the Government of Israel, in line with the commitments made in November 2021 at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Oslo, to increase the movement of goods and people into and out of the Gaza Strip and the steps taken in that regard. At the same time, I reiterate that more such measures are needed for durable economic benefits to materialize. I urge both parties to engage with the United Nations to find concrete ways to further enhance access and trade, including facilitating the entry of dual-use materials for key sectors of the economy under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism.

On 27 December 2021, the State of Qatar announced that it had signed an agreement with the PA and the Gaza Electricity Distribution Corporation to advance the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Israel to Gaza. The pipeline aims to reduce costs and increase efficiency and electricity generation at the Gaza power plant. I urge all parties to facilitate the implementation of that important project.

On 28 December 2021, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near

East (UNRWA) announced the start of cash assistance allocation of \$8.2 million to families whose homes were damaged during the May 2021 escalation. Thanks to exceptional financial contributions, an advance on 2022 contributions, a Central Emergency Response Fund loan and debt carried into 2022, UNRWA was able to sustain critical education, health care and humanitarian services for millions of Palestinian refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories and throughout the region. For 2022, UNRWA is again presenting a zero-growth core programme budget, despite the increased needs of Palestinian refugees. The Agency is confronted with a serious financial existential threat that can affect the rights and well-being of refugees and regional stability. I therefore urge Member States to continue and expand their contribution to UNRWA.

Turning briefly to the region, in the Golan, while the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has generally been maintained, violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties continue to increase tensions. It is important that the parties respect the obligations under the terms of the Agreement and refrain from taking unilateral steps in the occupied Golan that further erode peace and stability in the region.

During a visit to Lebanon in December, the Secretary-General expressed solidarity with the Lebanese people in the context of the country's difficult socioeconomic situation. He reiterated the need for political leaders to work together to urgently find a solution to the crisis.

Parliamentary elections have been announced for 15 May. The full reactivation of the Cabinet will be important, including to reliably support election preparations.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations remains relatively stable, despite isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour against peacekeepers. UNIFIL remains engaged with the parties to contain incidents and defuse tension along the Blue Line.

In closing, allow me to reiterate the urgent need for a coordinated approach to addressing the political, economic and institutional obstacles blocking the way for a meaningful peace process. Alongside key reforms and steps by all parties to defuse tensions, we must focus on providing a political context that will ensure that the positive engagement that we have witnessed in recent months is not squandered.

Partners, including those in the region, have a vital role to play. Efforts must also be made to continue to encourage all Palestinian political factions to move towards political consensus and bring Gaza and the occupied West Bank under one legitimate democratic Palestinian Authority.

Gaza remains integral to a future Palestinian State as a part of the two-State solution. Short-term challenges and urgent crises must be addressed. Yet, at the same time, we must ensure that the solution put in place advances our ultimate goal: an end to occupation and the achievement of a two-State solution on the basis of United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

The United Nations will continue to actively engage, along with its counterparts in the Middle East Quartet, regional and international partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders, to reach a just comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Majdalani.

**Ms. Majdalani:** I am a mother of two. I relate to the helpless feelings of Gazan parents seeing the heartbreaking images of children being rescued during this week's flash floods in Gaza and of others taking shelter under homes with roofs made of plastic sheets. Children in Gaza my daughter's age are growing up in a reality that no child in the world should experience: shortages of water, long dark, cold nights without electricity or fuel, wars, and close to 15 years of blockade that have resulted in medical and food insecurity. Added to this now are the catastrophes of climate change. Yes, we see it with our own eyes, today in Gaza, affecting the lives of 2 million people.

We as humans, activists, professionals and decision makers have a compelling obligation to prevent further humanitarian and environmental crisis. Following the United Nations Climate Conference in Glasgow, our hope is that world leaders will walk us down a path that comprises serious steps towards greater opportunities, not just to build back better, but to build forward towards the best possibilities.

I appear before the Security Council today as part of an extraordinary and brave group of Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli environmentalists. Together with my counterparts, Gidon Bromberg, Israeli Director,



and Yana Abu Taleb, Jordanian Director, we are leading EcoPeace Middle East, an organization committed to the principles of justice, peace, dignity, prosperity for all and the well-being of our shared environment and planet.

Our call for a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East could turn the region from a source of disturbing news into a recognized positive model for climate diplomacy and cooperation. The Deal proposes creating regional linkages and healthy interdependencies by the exchange of renewable energy and water. It also promotes taking proactive steps towards rehabilitating one of the most recognized water bodies in the world, the Jordan River, and the sustainable development around the entire watershed by initiating green businesses and jobs. The Deal addresses Palestinian water rights within a revised framework that is different from the all-or-nothing approach, with a view towards bringing water to every Palestinian home at no cost to Israel's water security.

Thanks to the Governments that support our work, including Sweden, the United States of America, Germany and others who sit in the Security Council, we witness the importance and quick returns of our work on the ground. Our educational programme is creating a cohort of young leaders, skilled professionals and creative individuals who understand their own national realities and interests and are eager to cooperate with their neighbours to find solutions.

During the past four years alone, we have reached out to 40,000 students, young professionals and teachers. Our virtual-reality platform, which we created with the help of young Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian engineers, is recognized as a useful educational tool by various prestigious institutions for higher-education programmes on water diplomacy. Our simulation game benefits decision makers, activists, journalists and others for second-track discussions on water and energy security. Our Impact Investment programme is supporting several green businesses, all led by local entrepreneurs, with elements of cross-border cooperation and knowledge transfer. We have advocated and helped raise investments worth over \$500 million for Jordanian and Palestinian water and sanitation infrastructure projects that address local and cross-border environmental concerns.

The water crisis in Palestine is the result of the political conflict, poor infrastructure, internal management issues, and now climate change. If only I

could entice members of the Council to visit Yatta, the third largest community in the West Bank, where water supply is as little as 30 litres per capita per day, which is far below the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization. Water insecurity is most severe in Area C, where the military occupation still impedes access to water and electricity. In Gaza, the situation is even more dire, where 97 per cent of aquifer water for domestic water supply is of a quality not suitable for human consumption. During the long summer months, Palestinian families need to strictly control how much water they consume and purchase water from water trucks at prices 10 to 20 times the cost of municipal water, leaving the family with very little to live on in terms of food and other basic needs.

The Oslo Accords from the mid-1990s still govern the water-allocation status between Palestinians and Israelis, where Israel takes the lion's share of natural water resources. The failure to make progress in the peace process means that Palestinian water rights are not yet met from shared aquifer sources and the Jordan River. Water issues remain, together with refugees, borders, illegal settlements and the status of Jerusalem, which will have to be resolved as a single package.

Natural population growth and economic development have only increased Palestinian water needs, forcing the Palestinian Authority to purchase large quantities of desalinated water from Israel, at an average cost of 250 million shekels annually, putting additional pressure on the fragile Palestinian economy. Failure to act now will only deepen existing Palestinian water and food insecurity, poverty and frustration. The difficult realities on the ground in the occupied West Bank and Gaza contribute directly and indirectly to unrest, with security implications for all in our region. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has indeed identified our region as a climate hotspot.

We have a strong interest in acting now and see an opportunity to do so. We call on the Security Council to consider our model of a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East to be a practical and attainable path towards achieving climate security and water diplomacy. We believe that climate issues need to be an integral part of the Middle East peace process, in order to advance the two-State solution within the 1967 borders.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Majdalani for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bromberg.

**Mr. Bromberg:** Today we have a window of opportunity to advance new Israeli-Palestinian water arrangements that can improve livelihoods, foster confidence-building and advance peace. The looming climate crisis demands that we do so urgently. Israel's leadership in the water sector, the dire impact of climate change on Palestinian fresh water availability and the new coalition Government in Israel all combine to create a unique context in which decisions could be taken towards conflict resolution, cooperation and trust-building in the water and climate sector.

A long-standing impediment to progress in Israeli-Palestinian water issues is the zero-sum mindset that sees one side's gain as the other side's loss. That is why, at EcoPeace Middle East, we work on the ground with schools, municipalities, young professionals and decision-makers. We highlight to all that, from an environmental perspective, we are fully dependent on each another. Working together, therefore, is not doing a favour to the other, but an issue of self-interest and mutual gain.

Our *Green Blue Deal* report calls on our Governments to act cooperatively on water issues under a climate-crisis paradigm, rather than continuing to hold water issues hostage to the politics of final status. By advancing the Green Blue Deal, we can achieve water security and climate resilience for Israelis, Palestinians and all in our region.

The status quo threatens water security and public health. Israel is well known for its leadership in the water sector and its ability to do advanced climate adaptation on water issues. Over 70 per cent of Israel's drinking water is now sourced from desalination plants. In addition, Israel is a global leader in treating and reusing wastewater for agriculture, creating water security for its farmers.

But while Israel has achieved a high level of water security, the conflict-related sanitation crisis in the West Bank and Gaza threatens the gains that are being made. In the West Bank, over 60 million cubic metres of Palestinian-sourced raw and poorly treated sewage are released annually into the environment, contaminating scarce groundwater. Israeli and Palestinian communities that live in close proximity to the 12 cross-border streams suffer from severe public health concerns. Similarly, the conflict-related sanitation crisis in Gaza risks the health and welfare of Palestinians and Israelis alike. The sewage from Gaza

released into the Mediterranean leads to the intermittent closure of Israel's southernmost desalination plants, directly impacting the Israeli water supply.

In order to protect its citizens, Israel unilaterally builds sewage treatment plants on its side. However, Israel deducts the cost of sewage treatment, including the capital cost of construction, from Palestinian taxes. In 2019, those deduction totalled over 110 million shekels. The deductions weaken the Palestinian Authority and create a disincentive to find sanitation solutions on the Palestinian side. As indicated in a 2017 report by Israel's State Comptroller's Office, the current water and sanitation arrangements fail both sides to effectively protect shared natural waters. That failure poses a threat to the gains made in Israel's water security.

The climate crisis further contributes to Palestinian water insecurity. At EcoPeace, we are determined to help our Governments and peoples understand that the climate crisis must lead to increased cooperation — Israelis and Palestinian experiencing first-hand the impact of the climate crisis. Climate change is no longer seen in our region as theoretical. It is recognized by all as an immediate threat to water, health and national security interests. As detailed by Ms. Majdalani before me, the combination of conflict, inter management issues and the climate crisis is significantly contributing to Palestinian water insecurity, loss of livelihood and animosity towards Israel.

The new coalition Government in Israel presents new opportunities. In recent months, coalition partners in Israel have reached out to the Palestinian Authority, with a desire to increase cooperation in the environment and water sectors. If implemented, such cooperation will improve the reality on the ground and build confidence essential to advancing peace efforts. Led by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Israel has identified the climate crisis as an issue of national priority. Israel has expressed a desire to work closely with the Biden Administration and Secretary Kerry in the global fight against climate change. Most recently, President Herzog created a national climate forum, and a working group on regional cooperation was established, which I have the honour of co-chairing. The link between the climate crisis and regional security is also acknowledged by the Israeli security community.

Those are our recommendations to the Security Council. Since Ms. Majdalani, Ms. Abu Taleb and

I briefed the Security Council three years ago (see S/PV.8517), much has changed. We outlined then a vision of how Governments could promote climate resilience by harnessing the sea through increased desalinated water, to be powered by harnessing the sun through large-scale investment in solar energy. Within less than a year since the release of our *Green Blue Deal* report, much due to the opportunities and changing circumstances described above, the Governments of Israel and Jordan signed a declaration of intent to establish a large-scale solar facility in Jordan that will sell electricity to Israel in exchange for desalinated water sales to Jordan. The deal represents a landmark climate-resilience agreement for our region.

The same Green Blue Deal rationale can now bring water security for Israelis and Palestinians, build confidence and keep alive prospects for peace. We ask the Security Council and relevant United Nations agencies to embrace a climate-resilience perspective and to prioritize Israeli-Palestinian climate security by calling on the parties to advance new arrangements for natural water allocation and pollution control. We invite foreign ministers to follow the lead of the Foreign Minister of Finland, His Excellency Mr. Pekka Haavisto, to help create a coalition of the willing in order to advance a Green Blue Deal of climate resilience in the Middle East. We call on the East Mediterranean Gas Forum to widen its mandate to include renewable energy and climate concerns in order to be a primary vehicle to advance climate security in our region.

Finally, we call on the Security Council to recognize globally that climate change is a threat to peace, within the meaning of Article 39 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Let me also thank the EcoPeace staff in Amman, Ramallah and Tel Aviv, our Board and the members of EcoPeace's International Advisory Committee. I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to present our civil society perspectives before the Security Council.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Bromberg for his briefing.

I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

**Mr. Al-Malki** (Palestine): As we gather here to discuss how to advance peace, Israel pursues its

relentless way against the Palestinian people on the ground.

Today, before dawn, Israeli forces surrounded and raided the Salhiye family house in Sheikh Jarrah, violently uprooting them — including their children — from their home, throwing them out in the freezing cold and arresting several members of the family and supporters before demolishing their homes, leaving behind despair and destruction. That happened while United Nations representatives rushed to the scene, where some were present just a few hours before, and despite their repeated calls against such crimes. The Salhiye family, forcibly displaced in 1948, is displaced once again.

Israel's denial of Palestinian rights and the defiance of the international community has continued for so long because it can rely on the fact there will be criticism and condemnations, but there will not be consequences. If the international community wants to help us end this conflict, it must end Israeli impunity.

There is a bias when it comes to Israel, but not the one that Israel claims exists. It is the bias shielding it from any form of accountability; the bias that has prevented the Security Council from ever acting under Chapter VII; the bias that has allowed Israel, instead of apologizing for its crimes and putting an end to them, to accuse even its closest partners of anti-Semitism for voting resolutions rooted in international law and human rights; the bias that has allowed it to attack the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council for performing their mandates and to insult and harass world leaders, Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, moral figures, celebrities and citizens for their stance regarding the question of Palestine; the bias that has allowed Israel to criminalize civil society and humanitarians and still be called a democracy; the bias that has allowed Israel to become a Member of the United Nations while, 75 years later, we have yet to become a member; the bias that recognizes a very widely interpreted right to security of an occupying Power, while the people under occupation are deprived of the most basic forms of protection.

The year 2021 was one of the deadliest for Palestinians in over a decade, including for Palestinian children, notably in the besieged Gaza Strip. It was one of the worst years in terms of home demolitions



and of advancement of settlement units in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

This year has barely started and yet its events offer a bleak picture of what awaits our people if resolute action is not undertaken. The first days of 2022 witnessed the killing of more Palestinians, even children and older persons, including Sheikh Suleiman Al-Hazaleen, the 80-year-old icon of popular peaceful resistance, as well as the announcement of plans for new settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem and continued dispossession and forced displacement of our people. In these circumstances, inaction would at best amount to complacency, at worst complicity.

The Palestinian people are here to stay. Their steadfastness has been tried and tested across decades and is unwavering. We urge the international community, however, to spare them more unnecessary suffering, to prevent yet another Palestinian generation from enduring this injustice and fate by providing them with the international protection they are entitled to and by helping us to end this colonial occupation now.

Why feel a sense of urgency regarding a century-long conflict when there are so many other pressing issues? Beyond the need to repair the historical injustice endured by the Palestinian people and to end decades of occupation and oppression, there is urgency because this conflict has a solution that may still be available today and that will no longer be viable tomorrow. The two-State solution the international community has legislated and defended for so long does not need United Nations representatives by its bedside to share comforting words. It needs them to save it. Absent this sense of urgency, States Members should prepare themselves to attend the funeral of this solution with all the consequences of such a death for the lives of millions of people, Palestinians and others.

The Palestinian people will survive, but the two-State solution may not. What happens then? Will the international community accept this apartheid in the twenty-first century, or will it convert to advocates of the one-State solution of freedom and equal rights for all between the river and the sea? These would be the only options available then.

We recognize the efforts of the international community in defence of the international consensus, and we are grateful for the principled solidarity and support long extended to our people. This is the decisive

moment where all these years, efforts and resources can bear fruit or be squandered.

Nothing good will come from waiting. Leaving the parties alone means leaving the steering wheel in the hands of extremist Israeli settlers, as they are the ones controlling the agenda in Israel.

While measures that may partially alleviate the hardships faced by our people are needed, they cannot serve as a substitute to addressing the root cause of our suffering and the conflict, which is the Israeli occupation. One cannot entrench the occupation and pretend to shrink the conflict. One cannot reject the two-State solution and the one-State solution, unlawfully annex our geography and besiege our demography, attack our people and holy sites, including in the holy city of Jerusalem, and demand for themselves alone peace, prosperity and security.

Since when is the peoples' right to self-determination subject to the goodwill of the colonial Power? Did any country represented at the United Nations accept such logic? Can anyone seriously argue that we should wait for Israel to be ready to end its occupation on its own, to wake up one day wiser and decide to redeem itself, to respect the rule of international law and to listen to the advice of the world based on its merits. Is there anyone around this table who believes this is a rational or winning strategy?

The fate of the Palestinian people cannot be left hostage to Israeli domestic politics and expansionist desires, and neither can the survival of the Israeli coalition serve as an excuse to deny the rights of an entire nation.

Israel displays the same arrogance displayed by colonial Powers blinded by their colonial appetite throughout history. Healing Israel from this disease is not only a service to Palestine, to the rule of international law and to our humanity, but also to Israel itself. Only when the cost of occupation outweighs its benefits will Israel ever consider ending it. The Israeli public will then demand it.

The resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 2334 (2016), provide a clear path to a just peace, the only path to peace. It is the responsibility of the Council to pursue the implementation of its own resolutions. It is important to enact the law and to condemn those violating it, but it is as important to pursue enforcement and ensure accountability. Israel wants

United Nations resolutions to conform with the illegal reality it has created on the ground, while the Council should ensure that the reality on the ground conforms to its resolutions. Israeli representatives proclaim their outrage that the Security Council is getting involved in the conflict, while the Council should be outraged by Israel's dismissive attitude and persistent violations. I invite the members of the Council to visit Palestine, to examine first-hand the situation on the ground and to discuss and adopt the steps needed to ensure that what was adopted here affects realities there.

Do those who claim that conditions are not yet ripe for peace think that, without international intervention, they will ever be? Thirty years ago, the Madrid Conference was held not because the parties themselves had decided to make peace, but because the world left them with no other option. If Yitzhak Shamir had been allowed to veto the peace negotiations, they never would have been held. It is that kind of resolve and sense of urgency that we need today, leading to the convening of an international conference for peace that would mobilize all the goodwill and means available out there to salvage peace and achieve a just solution in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

Many hoped that the end of the Trump Administration and the Netanyahu Government would be enough to pave the way for renewed momentum for peace. But while the new United States Administration has reversed several of the unlawful and ill-advised policies of its predecessor — and we hope it will fulfil its remaining commitments — it has yet to ensure the current Israeli Government renounces its colonial policies and abandons its rejection of the two-State solution and peace negotiations. That is an unacceptable stance that should neither be tolerated nor excused and must be reversed. The United States special relationship with Israel means it has a special responsibility in that regard.

The Middle East Quartet also has an important role to play, as the body mandated by the Security Council for the very purpose of ending the occupation and achieving peace. We cannot but echo the call made by Russia to convene the Quartet at the ministerial level as soon as possible to mobilize efforts to break out of the current impasse.

In parallel, each State can help roll back the occupation and advance peace by upholding its own

obligations, in line with international law and the relevant resolutions, including obligations of distinction between Israel and the territories it has occupied since 1967, non-recognition and non-assistance to illegal actions and policies and advancing accountability. We are grateful to every citizen taking action, every organization taking a principled stance and every State making a contribution.

There are many important initiatives being taken to advance justice and peace by actors in our region and across the world. What we need is a common agenda for peace that translates those positions and efforts into collective measures to deter crimes and promote compliance, thereby helping advance a just peace.

Commentators speak of the fatigue of the international community with the Palestinian question. While we understand how one can tire of a conflict that has lasted so long, believe me that no one is more tired than the children who have had to survive four wars to reach the age of 15. No one is more tired than the mother who fears seeing her son arrested or killed each time he leaves the house, or than the hundreds of Palestinian parents never mentioned in the Council who are denied the simple right to a dignified burial for their loved ones.

No one is more tired than the prisoners who can resort only to life-threatening hunger strikes to protest their arbitrary detention, or than the refugees who, after finding shelter, have to face the settlers' creeping annexation reaching their doorstep — victims of a system that privileges one kind of human being over another. Their calls for justice must be heeded.

This is a time for action and a time for peace, not apartheid.

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

**Mr. Erdan (Israel):** I am pleased to be speaking here today and to have the opportunity, at the outset, to congratulate the new members of the Security Council.

I expressed my hope a year ago that the discussions on the Middle East in this forum would be more balanced and finally focus on the true threats that plague the region. Unfortunately, I have to convey that wish again for the year 2022. Indeed, today there are serious actors that threaten regional stability and security, none more so than Iran, whose leaders continue to weave their web of terror across the region.

I want to begin, in fact, by expressing my deepest condolences to the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates following the abhorrent attack by the Iranian-sponsored Houthi terrorist group, as well as to the Permanent Representative of India for the loss of life.

There is no doubt that the threat caused by the Iranian regime demands the urgent attention of the entire world, and especially that of the Security Council. Yet despite such urgent and pressing issues, we regrettably find ourselves once again hearing the same false narratives attacking Israel. It is just the same old falsehoods and the same old hypocrisy. If there is one word that stands out above everything else at the United Nations, it is hypocrisy.

From the Palestinian Foreign Minister, we heard all of those regurgitated accusations and baseless claims. But as he stands here and points the finger at Israel, what the Minister conveniently ignores is that, in the past month — just one month — more than 200 terror attacks have been carried out by Palestinians against Israeli citizens. There have been 143 rock-throwing attacks in just one month. There have been 20 grenade and Molotov cocktail attacks, as well as dozens more stabbings, car rammings, shootings and other violent physical attacks, risking and claiming Israeli lives, all in just one month.

That ended a year which saw thousands of other violent attacks against Israelis — attacks that are, at best, only marginally mentioned in the Council. Those attacks include rockets fired indiscriminately from Gaza, shootings and stabbings of civilians in Jerusalem and car rammings.

But there is another kind of terror attack, a kind of Palestinian terror that endangers the daily lives of innocent civilians throughout Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem, that is neither mentioned in United Nations reports nor presented here before the Council. Such terror attacks with rocks — not little stones, but rocks like this, which are thrown at Israelis in their cars and on buses. Rocks are thrown at Israeli men and women, at Israeli babies and children, every single day.

In 2021 alone, Israelis suffered 1,775 rock attacks by Palestinian terrorists, but the world says nothing. Would members of the Council consider it a terror attack if a rock were thrown at their car while driving with their children? That is exactly the kind of attack that claimed the life of 4-year-old Adele Biton and others.

What would the representatives here do? Would they, at the very least, condemn those brutal terror attacks carried out against Israeli civilians by Palestinians?

Look at this: rocks kill. A terrorist is not only someone with a gun, not only someone with a bomb. Rocks can and do kill. But do we hear condemnation from the Palestinian Authority? Did the Palestinian Authority condemn the murder of Eli Kay, an Israeli tour guide who was shot in the back by a Palestinian terrorist as he walked in Jerusalem a few weeks ago? Did the Palestinian Authority condemn and decry the murder of Yehuda Dimentman, who was ambushed in his car and murdered last month? Do they condemn, or do they condone? Where is the voice of the Palestinian leadership against any violence? Israelis do not hear it, the international community does not hear it, and the Palestinian people certainly do not hear any condemnation. Instead, they hear encouragement and incitement.

When the Palestinians see the support and honour that their leaders give to terrorists, they see clearly that terror pays.

That hypocrisy, that moral bankruptcy is a poison that is spread online, in the media, in the mosques and even in the schools under the Palestinian Authority. Yet despite all that, the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who has not once condemned acts of Palestinian terror, has the audacity to accuse Israel of violence. He blames Israelis when he knows very well that Israeli violence against Palestinians is the exception to the rule, not the norm. He knows very well that whenever there are such incidents, Israel and its leadership find it abhorrent. We probe, we investigate and we condemn.

But when Palestinians attack Israelis, the Palestinian Authority celebrates, congratulates and rewards. The Palestinian Authority continues to pay the salaries of terrorists in a pay-to-slay policy that means that the more Jewish blood you spill, the more money you and your family get.

But the hypocrisy does not end there either. The Security Council also continues to fail at clearly condemning Palestinian terror. Israel, a country with a robust legal system that has zero tolerance for violence and terror regardless of the perpetrator's identity, is blamed, while the Palestinians' acts of terror and incitement are whitewashed. That lack of perspective and proportion only serves to send one message to

the Palestinians: that Jewish blood is cheap and terror against Jews is acceptable.

The Palestinians look for every chance to distort reality in order to inflame the situation on the ground while the international community embraces their libel. What is happening right now in Sheikh Jarrah is a perfect example. We are talking about a family that stole public land for their own private use while those lands had been earmarked for the building of a school for children with special needs. That is a municipal issue that has gone through all the respected channels of the independent Israeli legal system, yet nevertheless the Palestinians used this issue and the Pavlovian anti-Israel response of the United Nations for their own political gain.

I hope that the international community will take the time to verify the facts before immediately embracing the Palestinians' falsehoods. It is not too late for the Security Council to make a New Year's resolution. Let 2022 be the year in which it no longer allows endless attacks on Israel from its platform. Let 2022 be the year in which it holds the Palestinians accountable for their crimes. Let 2022 be the year in which the United Nations, as an institution, ends the hypocrisy against Israel.

When the world and the Security Council in particular applies its moral compass correctly, then we may well find the path to peace. But so long as it allows itself to be led on by the lies of terrorists and their supporters, we will all continue to wander in the wilderness of an ongoing conflict.

The real obstacle to peace was and is the Palestinians' inability to accept Israel's existence in the region as the Jewish State. We educate our children in coexistence and tolerance while the Palestinians teach their children hatred and violence, while they incite against Israel and the Jewish people and while they promote boycotts and attack Israel in international bodies.

On the ground, there are nonetheless positive steps being taken to increase cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. The Council heard from EcoPeace about the importance of environmental cooperation and how we need to work together to promote climate resilience and water security, and that is right. The past years have shown what we can do in our region when there is a will to succeed and build bridges. The water-for-energy deal between Israel, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates shows how collaboration can solve the planet's greatest

problems and bring real cooperation — with the help of the United States, by the way.

Israel has proved time after time that it is committed to regional cooperation and to improving the lives of the Palestinians. One of the best ways to do so is indeed through environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources. In fact, as Minister of Environmental Protection, I personally promoted many attempted initiatives to address those exact issues. Sadly, the Palestinian leadership had different priorities.

A number of months ago, Israel's current Minister of Environmental Protection, Tamar Zandberg, met with her Palestinian counterpart. That was the first meeting of its kind since 2014, not because of Israel, of course. Israel's Minister Zandberg presented numerous collaborative initiatives regarding the environment and waste management, but Israel is still waiting for a response from the Palestinians.

Harmony — that is what Israel wants. But hypocrisy and terror — that is what Israel gets.

The Palestinians are not alone in the Middle East when it comes to supporting terror and delegitimizing Israel. At the beginning of my statement, I expressed my condolences following the Houthis' drone terror attack. That was sponsored by Iran, as are most of the acts of terror carried out in the region. What the Houthis have in common with Hizbullah and Hamas is that they are all terror proxies of the same malicious sponsor.

The whole region continues to live under the shadow of the Iranian threat. As the talks in Vienna reach a critical stage, the international community faces a crossroads. If the Iranians are allowed to think that the world does not seriously intend to stop them as they race towards the bomb, then they will continue to build a nuclear bomb. If Iran is allowed to think that it can continue to build a corridor of terror from Tehran to the Mediterranean, then that is what it will do. If Iran is allowed to think that it can continue to oppress its own people and leave them in poverty, and even without water, while it spends every penny on its missile programmes, then that is what it will do.

Those are not just Israel's problems. Iran, the biggest State sponsor of terror, strives to impose its radical Shi'ite hegemony on the region and beyond. That is not just a problem for Israel; that is a problem



for the whole world, and that problem should be the focus of the Council in 2022.

There are those who say that Iran has the opposite of the Midas touch, that everything it touches turns to terror and destruction rather than gold. Just look at Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Yemen. But unlike the Midas touch, that is no myth.

Time is not on our side, but with goodwill and a strong desire, that, too, can become a page in history, and we can all go on to build a better future for the peoples of the Middle East. That is the sincere New Year's wish of the State and the people of Israel.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing. I also want to thank Gidon Bromberg and Nada Majdalani of EcoPeace Middle East for being here today. Their climate and security work is a good example of how important it is to support regional and local peacebuilding and trust-building initiatives and how addressing shared problems can be a possible entry point for finding common ground.

Norway's unwavering support for a negotiated two-State solution remains unchanged. At present, the goal seems distant. Conflict and tensions are running high. In 2022, we must steer the situation onto a better track.

First, the violence and acts of terrorism must be stopped. All civilians must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. Human rights must be respected. Human rights defenders must be protected. A vibrant civil society in Palestine is crucial.

Secondly, Israel must cease settlement building, demolitions and evictions. The settlements on occupied land are illegal under international law. They undermine the prospects of a two-State solution, and they escalate the conflict. Last night, another Palestinian family was evicted from their home in East Jerusalem. This must stop. Furthermore, the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem must be respected.

Thirdly, a strong Palestinian Authority is needed. I call on Israel to revise policies and actions that weaken the Palestinian Authority and the economy. The donor group that Norway chairs has outlined a programme for continued Palestinian State-building. We must implement it. I call on the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its democratic legitimacy among its people.

I call on the factions to revive efforts to achieve unity in Palestine. We, the international community, must provide support and do our part. We should cooperate with any Palestinian Government that rejects the use of violence and adheres to previous agreements made by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Fourthly, the situation for the people in Gaza must be improved. I welcome Israel's willingness to adjust its policies, including increasing movement and trade. I call for long-term solutions, a ceasefire and calm. People on both sides will benefit. They want to live in security. United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), are the international community's main instruments in Gaza. We must ensure that UNRWA can continue to meet the critical needs of Palestine refugees.

Fifthly, I welcome the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab States. It is essential that the Palestinians also be involved and benefit from the process. Meaningful progress in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians would reinforce the process of normalization and promote stability in the region.

Sixthly, resuming negotiations is a matter of urgency. The issue of borders and territory must be resolved before it is too late. I urge the parties to explore how they can resume talks, even if they are not ready to start yet. Agreed immediate steps in the right direction would help steer the situation onto a better track.

In conclusion, I would like to remind us all that parameters for the two-State solution have been established by the Security Council, most recently in resolution 2334 (2016), and we continue to support a return to negotiations based on the 1967 lines, the relevant Security Council resolutions, international law and internationally agreed parameters.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana.

**Ms. Botchwey (Ghana):** I am pleased to participate in this open debate on the situation in the Middle East and commend Norway for its leadership on this crucial matter. I also thank the briefers for their briefings before the Security Council on the prevailing situation in the Middle East.



Finding a lasting solution to the situation in the Middle East is a responsibility that we cannot shirk or ignore. That is not a challenge that will disappear one day without a collective commitment to dialogue between the parties and the support of the international community. We know that the consequences of inaction would be even more dire down the road.

Despite the several important interventions by the international community and the parties since the holding of the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the objective of a peaceful and comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East has continued to elude us. The unending suffering of the Israeli and Palestinian people and the prospect of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East compel us to be steadfast in pursuit of the decades-long objective.

The worsening security and humanitarian situation in the region amid the crisis of the global coronavirus disease pandemic is alarming and calls for the renewed attention of the international community. The Council must urgently address the question of how to revitalize effective and coordinated peace talks, based on lessons learned, building on past initiatives and exploring new possibilities through which Israel and Palestine can both realize their aspirations for normality, opportunity for every Israeli and Palestinian and, indeed, statehood.

Ghana believes that a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living peacefully side by side on the basis of pre-1967 borders remains the viable option for restoring lasting peace and stability in the region. Ghana therefore appreciated Norway's facilitation of the in-person ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in November 2021. We thank the donor community and international development partners for their commitment to supporting a meaningful and comprehensive settlement. Ghana commends the recent efforts of the Secretary-General and the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet to address critical concerns related to the fiscal conditions in Palestine and the tense conditions in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza.

Advancing the peace process requires regional and international actors to deploy the tools of diplomacy to build and sustain momentum around the recent high-level engagements. It also requires both sides to the conflict to overcome past mistrust, work to rebuild trust and goodwill and engage their public on a vision

of peace that promises security and prosperity. None of that will be easy. The cost of not doing it would be harder.

Ghana condemns all acts of terrorism and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the parties. Those actions exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. While reminding the parties of their obligations under international law and several resolutions of the Council, we urge them to refrain from unilateral actions that obstruct and undermine efforts aimed at achieving comprehensive and just peace to the decades-old conflict.

We thank Member States for their financial contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and urge increased support to reverse the critical funding deficit of the organization to enable it to continue its vital mission of supporting those affected by the conflict. We call on the Secretary-General to facilitate a process that enables us to address the options for more sustainable and predictable humanitarian funding for the Middle East.

Without the genuine commitment of the parties to the peace process, a peaceful resolution of the conflict will continue to slip through our grasp. We therefore urge the parties to resume direct negotiations for comprehensive and lasting peace, in the spirit of cooperation and in good faith.

Finally, I wish to express Ghana's commitment to supporting and facilitating the path to lasting peace in the Middle East and underscore the need for cooperation and unified action among all Member States and, in particular, the Council.

**The President:** I now call on the Permanent Representative of the United States and member of President Biden's Cabinet.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): Before I deliver my remarks, I would like to extend my condolences to the United Arab Emirates. The United States condemns in unqualified terms Monday's terrorist attack in Abu Dhabi, which killed three innocent citizens.

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I extend a special welcome to and thank our briefers from EcoPeace Middle East. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Erdan, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the

Observer State of Palestine, Mr. Al-Malki, to today's meeting. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of and welcome the Ghanaian Foreign Minister.

This year offers an opportunity to recommit to reaching a political solution to the conflict. Let me therefore start by reaffirming our strong support for a two-State solution, one in which Jewish and democratic Israel lives in peace alongside a sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State. As I have noted before, I look forward to the day when we do not find the need to single out Israel for this type of unfair focus in the Security Council.

All forms of hatred and violence stand in stark opposition to the goal of a two-State solution. We are particularly concerned about tensions in the West Bank, Gaza and in and around Jerusalem, especially violence perpetrated against civilians attempting to go about their daily lives. To make progress, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority must refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-State solution. That includes annexations of territory, settlement activity, demolitions and evictions, similar to what we saw in Sheikh Jarrah, incitement to violence and compensation for individuals in prison for acts of terrorism.

I would like to reiterate a point I made to the Council previously for our new members. It was clear to me from my November trip to Israel and the West Bank that Israelis and Palestinians are locked in a spiral of mutual distrust that prevents the type of cooperation that could bring about prosperity, freedom and security for all. Israelis do not believe they have a partner for peace, while Palestinians are trapped in despair, borne out of the complete absence of a political horizon. That gap in trust is the single-biggest obstacle to political progress and peace. Most of the work of rebuilding that trust needs to be done directly between the Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

The recent meeting between Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Gantz yielded tangible steps, including Israel's transfer of \$33 million in tax payments to the Palestinians, the issuance of business permits and humanitarian status approval. My hope is that we can keep building on that progress and that we can all play a role in facilitating further positive steps. For example, I would like to applaud Jordan and Egypt for the constructive role that they have played in preventing renewed violence,

particularly the 26 December meeting they held in Cairo with the Palestinian Authority.

We also appreciate Norway's contribution as Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The Committee serves as an important forum for the international community to support economic development for Palestinians. The Council, too, can facilitate forward momentum, as can civil society organizations such as the one we heard from today, EcoPeace Middle East. I again thank our briefers for their presentations. Israeli and Palestinian civil society members are instrumental in building bridges among people in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan. Educational programmes and round tables to discuss projects such as the Green Blue Deal for the Middle East are important for addressing shared issues that know no boundaries or borders, such as climate change. We encourage broadening those types of exchanges to also include the Abraham Accords signatories. We need to underscore the importance of dialogue and technical exchanges to address our shared challenges.

Finally, on 27 January, the United States will join people from nations around the world to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. When I was in Israel, I had the great honour of rekindling the eternal flame in the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem. That solemn ceremony, next to the crypt that held the ashes of Holocaust victims from across Europe, served as a poignant reminder for me of our obligation to never forget. Remembering and honouring the victims of the Holocaust means more than reflection; it means taking action. That is especially true as anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial are on the rise. The harrowing events in Colleyville, Texas, this past weekend brought this home for us Americans. It reminds us that we all must work together to stand against anti-Semitism and extremism.

The United States will continue to champion justice for the victims of anti-Semitism and for Holocaust survivors and their descendants. We are committed to building a world in which the lessons of the Holocaust are taught universally, survivors live out their days in dignity and comfort and all human lives are shown decency and compassion. For the first time in many years, all members of the Council have diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. That is testament to the important shifts under way in the Middle East and indicative of Israel's contribution on the world stage. Let us avail ourselves of this opportunity to move

beyond our standard talking points and identify ways to support the parties in pursuit of sustainable and lasting peace for all of their people.

**The President:** I now call on the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for Political Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank you, Madam President, for presiding over today's important debate, and I welcome the distinguished Ministers present in the Chamber today. I also thank the Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his invaluable briefing, as well as Ms. Nada Majdalani and Mr. Gidon Bromberg for highlighting the importance of addressing the negative impacts of climate change.

Today's debate comes at an important and pressing moment. Despite the positive developments towards achieving stability and prosperity throughout the region that have occurred in the Middle East recently, treacherous attempts to spread chaos and terrorism are still being made there. In particular, we refer to the crimes committed by the Houthi militias, including the attacks a few days ago against civilians and civilian facilities in the United Arab Emirates.

My country strongly condemns this criminal escalation, and we express our sincere condolences to the families of the three victims and wish the injured a speedy recovery. I also thank the more than 90 countries that have supported us in condemning these terrorist acts.

Notwithstanding the persistent challenges in the region, we believe that opportunities still exist to achieve peace in the Middle East. In our first open debate on this agenda item since we joined the Council, we would like to highlight the importance of seriously striving to counter terrorism and end the region's crises and conflicts, which extend from Palestine and Yemen through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and Libya.

In this context, my country reiterates its commitment to supporting the brotherly Palestinian people and their right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and all other agreed international terms of reference.

To that end, I would like to focus today on the following issues. First, all illegal practices in the

occupied Palestinian territory must stop, and Israel must shoulder its responsibilities in that regard. We refer in this context to the construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation and demolition of Palestinian property, and the forced displacement of residents, as we have seen today in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. We stress the need to maintain the existing historical and legal status of Jerusalem.

Secondly, considering the fragility of the situation, we stress the need to prevent or ease any escalation that may occur. We also need to maintain the latest ceasefire. In this regard, we value the ongoing efforts of our brothers in the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We call for the need to build confidence, break the current stalemate and relaunch a credible peace process. We hope that the recent high-level meeting between the two parties will lead to new opportunities to engage in dialogue.

Thirdly, we emphasize the importance of providing assistance to the Palestinian people, who continue to suffer from difficult conditions, especially as humanitarian needs have significantly grown since the onset of the pandemic. For its part, my country recently sent vaccines and medical aid to the Gaza Strip and helped it to respond to the water crisis. We are also supporting the construction of a new school to be run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the United Nations entities and other donors.

In conclusion, my country believes that striving to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question will block attempts to exploit the conflict, sow divisions or spread extremist ideologies in the region. In order to achieve a stable future for the Middle East, the Security Council must work to create an environment conducive to peace and come up with unified positions to address the region's issues. In this context, we stress the importance of compliance by all parties with Council resolutions. It is also important for the international community to work today toward fundamentally resolving crises rather than simply managing them. We are aware that doing so will not be easy, but we will work diligently in cooperation with the Member States to restore peace and stability in the region.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Madam President, we welcome you as you

preside over the Security Council today. We also wish to note the participation in today's meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ghana, Ms. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki.

We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East region in the context of finding a settlement. We listened closely to Mr. Gidon Bromberg and Ms. Nada Majdalani.

With regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the degree of violence continues unabated and is claiming casualties on both sides. The situation as described today by the Special Coordinator is further exacerbated by Israel's unilateral, unlawful acts, breaches of the status of the holy sites, expansion of settlement activities, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, expulsion of Palestinians, arbitrary arrests and violence targeting civilians.

It is with concern that we have been learning about sporadic outbreaks of violence in Jerusalem as a result of which there have been casualties. Specifically, we are very troubled by yesterday's action by the Israeli police in Sheikh Jarrar, as a result of which a Palestinian family was evicted from its home.

We call upon the parties to exercise restraint and to abandon and reject radical measures that create irreversible facts on the ground. We call upon them to rekindle a peaceful settlement process on a universally recognized international legal basis. We attach great significance to the comprehensive international assistance being provided to those in need on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in the Gaza Strip, as well as to Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab countries.

We support the efforts of key international organizations, among which we emphasize those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We believe that the need to provide financial assistance to UNRWA remains ongoing and important, so that it may continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East without hindrance. Russia will continue to make annual voluntary contributions to UNRWA's budget.

In this context, we welcome the results of the Ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Oslo last November. We note Norway's contribution in organizing this event, which attests to the fact that

the international community remains focused on a Middle East settlement.

The focus of today's debate under Norway's presidency of the Security Council is setting the stage for the expeditious relaunch of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. We fully believe that a settlement is possible only through the launch of direct talks between the parties. At the same time, we believe there is an urgent need to step up multilateral efforts to create a propitious atmosphere for talks, first and foremost, in the format of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators. We intend to continue to make assiduous efforts with our Quartet partners aimed at boosting the effectiveness of this mediation mechanism by determining and identifying possible collective measures to implement what has been endorsed in United Nations resolutions, namely, the two-State solution.<sup>[P.3]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup> We reaffirm the importance of convening a Quartet meeting at the Ministerial level and of establishing full-fledged cooperation under this mechanism with the Palestinians, Israelis and other key regional stakeholders. I also wish to emphasize that progress in the peace process is impossible absent Palestinian reunification through the Palestine Liberation Organization. We stand ready alongside other interested parties, first and foremost, our Egyptian friends to provide the necessary assistance to that end.

In conclusion, I wish to note that we have growing concerns about plans that have been unveiled vis-à-vis the expansion of Israel settlement activities in the occupied Golan Heights. I refer not merely to the ongoing cutting of red tape for Ramat Trump settlement, which was announced in 2020, but also to the creation of two new settlements, Asif and Matar, with 12,000 housing units. The stated goal of the Israeli leadership is to double the number of Israelis residing in the Golan Heights, which flies in the face of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

For our part, we emphasize Russia's position, which remains unchanged — we do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which are an integral part of Syria.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome you, Minister Huitfeldt, and thank you for presiding over today's meeting. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I also listened carefully to the briefings delivered by the two representatives of EcoPeace Middle East.



This year marks the seventy-fifth year that the question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda. We hope that the new year brings new hope to the Palestinian people. The international community should act with a stronger sense of urgency by taking vigorous actions to promote an early, comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue.

First, violence and hostilities must be stopped and tensions eased. Last year saw continued unrest in the occupied Palestinian territory, with 324 Palestinians killed in hostilities and violence. There were also civilian casualties on the Israeli side. Since the new year, the situation on the ground has continued to be tense and worrisome. We call on all parties concerned to keep calm, exercise restraint, refrain from hostilities and violence and consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza. As the occupying Power, Israel must fulfil its obligations under international law, guarantee the safety of the people in the occupied territories, investigate violence against Palestinian civilians and maintain the historically established status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Israel's legitimate security concerns must be respected.

Secondly, all Security Council resolutions must be implemented and settlement activities must stop. In 2021, Jewish settlement in the West Bank continued to expand, and the number of demolished Palestinian homes was the highest since 2016. Settlement activities in the occupied territories violate international law. We urge Israel to stop demolishing Palestinian homes, expelling Palestinians and expanding settlements and to create conditions for the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

We are equally concerned about Israel's recent announcement that it will invest more than \$300 million in settlement construction in the Golan. The international community recognizes Syria's sovereignty over the Golan. China urges Israel to stop settlement activities that could cause tensions.

Thirdly, the economy and people's livelihoods should receive attention, and humanitarian assistance should be scaled up. At present, Palestine is in a deep economic and financial crisis, the humanitarian situation is worrisome and the people are living under difficult circumstances. The international community should step up its support, strengthen the Palestinian Authority and empower it to exercise its sovereign

functions in the fields of security and financing and provide basic public services.

China appreciates the efforts of Egypt, Qatar and other countries of the region to rebuild Gaza and calls on all parties to increase financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In that connection, we take note of recent measures taken by Israel, such as handing over tax collections to the Palestinian side, and we hope that will help restore Palestinian-Israeli economic coordination in support of civilians. China once again calls on Israel to lift its blockade on the Gaza Strip.

Fourthly, all efforts should be mobilized to promote peace and implement the two-State solution. History and reality have repeatedly shown that the two-State solution is the only viable way to resolve the Palestinian issue. The international community should promote an objective and fair approach, advocate tolerance and mutual understanding and do more for the resumption of dialogue on an equal footing between the two sides, based on the two-State solution.

We hope that the two sides will take the recent high-level contacts as an opportunity to gradually build mutual trust and continue to build momentum. We expect all parties in Palestine to strengthen solidarity, achieve internal reconciliation through consultations and dialogue and form a unified negotiating position. We look forward to productive results from the upcoming dialogue in Algeria.

We urge the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and countries with important influence to play a more active role in the process and call for the holding of an international peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of all the permanent members of the Council and all stakeholders in the Middle East peace process so that we can pool broader and more effective peace efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that China supports the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, and supports the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel and the common development of the Arab and Jewish peoples. China will continue to work relentlessly with the international community towards the early settlement of the Palestinian issue.



**Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland):** I would like to thank you, Minister Huitfeldt, for being with us and presiding over today's debate. I also welcome all visiting Ministers. I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive and sobering briefing. I also thank Mr. Bromberg and Ms. Majdalani for their valuable insights on cooperation to deal with the challenges posed by the region's climate crisis.

The grim events of May reminded us all that the Security Council can ill afford to be complacent on the situation in the Middle East. Ireland reiterates that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains both essential and urgent. It is incumbent on the Council and the wider international community to instil fresh momentum for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

We have no illusions about the scale of the challenge. However, that does not absolve the Council of its responsibility to reinvigorate its efforts, not least for the sake of young people and their future. More than 40 per cent of Israel's population is under the age of 25, and more than 70 per cent of the population of the occupied Palestinian territory is under the age of 30. We have a collective duty to help ensure that those young people are given the prospect of a renewed political horizon that will allow them to live in peace and ensure their role in preserving peace.

Ireland remains steadfast in our commitment to a resolution of the conflict, ending the occupation and achieving a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. That is the path to progress for all the people of Israel and Palestine.

Ireland is gravely concerned about the recent high levels of violence, including settler-related violence, as well as a ratcheting-up of rhetoric. We condemn all acts of violence and call for the de-escalation of tensions. Ireland calls on Israel to ensure that its security operations, including in Areas A and B of the West Bank, are proportionate and take full account of the obligation to protect civilians, particularly children.

Over the past few days, Israel carried out a demolition in Sheikh Jarrah, in occupied East Jerusalem, for the first time since 2017. That operation culminated in the destruction this morning of two family homes and their source of livelihood. This is part of an ongoing pattern of demolitions, evictions and

settlement expansion across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which continues apace. Those actions have severe humanitarian consequences, and this incident in particular threatens the fragile status quo in East Jerusalem and risks increasing violence.

International humanitarian law, and in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, prohibits the unnecessary destruction of private property. Demolitions contribute to a coercive living environment for affected Palestinian communities. Once again, we call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to fulfil its obligations towards this community and to cease its harmful practice of evictions and demolitions of Palestinian property.

Ireland reiterates our long-standing position on the illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This week's decision regarding the construction of 1,465 units as part of the Lower Aqueduct plan, as well as planned construction in the sensitive parts of Area E-1, in Atarot and Givat Hamatos, threaten the contiguity of a future Palestinian State and must not proceed.

We reiterate our call for an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continues to hamper reconstruction. Ireland condemns the recent attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip, as well as the increased inflammatory rhetoric. The long-suffering civilian population of Gaza urgently needs a political horizon and an economic path forward to a sustainable future.

Ireland welcomes the meeting between President Abbas and Minister Gantz and looks forward to the implementation of the outcomes of that cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We call for progress on prisoner issues, the return of human remains and further measures that will improve the lives of Palestinians, which could assist in building much-needed confidence for a political process. Ireland looks forward to the second phase of local elections to be held in March, which could help contribute to a renewal of Palestinian institutions.

Ireland will continue to support the Palestinian people, including through its support for Palestinian institutions, civil society and United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

We reiterate our concern at the recent Israeli decision to designate certain Palestinian civil society

organizations as terrorist entities. Ireland's commitment to civil society remains undimmed.

We call for continued support for UNRWA and the resumption of the United States-Palestine economic dialogue, as well as assistance from States in the region for the Palestinian Authority. Support for both the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA is critical for regional stability.

**Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil):** I thank Mr. Wennesland for the updates provided to the Security Council. We would also like to thank EcoPeace Middle East for its insightful work and ideas. The efforts of EcoPeace Middle East remind us how Palestine's prosperity and Israel's security are intertwined. Cooperation and mutual respect cultivated from the bottom up are both welcome and desired, as are new perspectives and initiatives aimed at a just and lasting solution to the conflict. The Abraham Accords are also such an effort and through them old rivalries give way to dialogue and diplomacy.

As we begin a new mandate as an elected member, we are concerned to see how little progress has been made in the Middle East peace process since the last time we sat in the Council. New challenges keep emerging, and existing crises continue unresolved, taking a heavy toll on human life across the region.

We have witnessed already a dangerous escalation in violence as the year began, with increasing tensions in the Gaza Strip. The episode showed how the ceasefire achieved in May 2021 remains fragile. We take this opportunity to stress that there can be no justification for any attacks against civilians. We urge both parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and protect civilian lives.

Despite the rise in violence, we were pleased to see the recent direct talks held between Palestinian and Israeli high-level authorities. Dialogue is essential for addressing the urgent challenges that affect both sides. It is also an important confidence-building measure to rekindle the political process, and we hope that such meetings can become more and more frequent.

As the Special Coordinator pointed out, the economic and fiscal crisis in the Palestinian territories worsens the prospects for political stability. We were encouraged by the first round of local elections held last December, and we expect the second round can be held as planned next March. Transparent and inclusive

elections are an essential step to strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of Palestinian institutions and should be supported.

The situation in Gaza remains worrisome. Poverty and political instability constitute fertile ground for extremist forces. Brazil supports the reconstruction of Gaza and the provision of humanitarian aid on a predictable, responsible and regular basis. We would also like to acknowledge Norway's efforts to improve Gaza's situation through cooperation, by hosting the meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians and the Middle East Quartet last November.

As the only Latin American country that is a member of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Brazil is concerned about the lack of resources to sustain essential services for 2 million refugees across the region in the areas of education, health-care services and other basic needs. We continue to be fully committed to UNRWA's valuable work.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Brazil's long-standing commitment to the achievement of a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security in two democratic, prosperous and sovereign States, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico)** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Mr. Bromberg and Mr. Majdalani for their briefings, and I welcome Minister Malki and the delegation of Israel.

At the Madrid Conference in 1991, the first steps were taken to initiate a dialogue between Arab and Israeli leaders. Over the past 30 years, we have seen several phases of understanding, from the Oslo Accords to the recent Abraham Accords, as well as regional cooperative initiatives such as the water management projects among Jordan, Israel and Palestine promoted by EcoPeace.

Some recent instances of reconciliation are steps in the right direction. In that regard, we applaud the meeting held between Defence Minister Gantz and President Abbas, and we commend the economic plan for Gaza of Minister Lapid. We urge the parties to keep the channels of communication open and to strengthen civilian cooperation in the areas of security and taxes.

While the easing of restrictions in Gaza is positive, it is not sufficient. The blockade of the Gaza Strip must be permanently lifted. We regret that the central demand of the Palestinian people — their right to self-determination — remains pending.

Mexico reiterates its commitment to a two-State solution formulated in a way that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and allows for the creation of a Palestinian State, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions, within secure and internationally recognized borders, while maintaining the special status of Jerusalem.

We note with concern the ongoing actions on the ground that undermine the viability of the two-State solution, such as the case of evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, including the one that took place this morning. Mexico condemns the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, as well as the consequences of the appropriation, eviction and demolition of Palestinian structures.

In all cases, we condemn the use of force. Attacks by settlers on Palestinian civilians are as deplorable as attacks from Gaza on Israeli civilians. We urge the parties to exercise maximum restraint.

In conclusion, we welcome all efforts to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation, while welcoming the talks held by the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process with his European Union and Russian counterparts. We hope that a meeting of the Middle East Quartet will soon take place, as that would be a positive step forward in a process that is not only deadlocked but eroding day by day in the face of the prevailing inaction.

**Mr. Tirumurti** (India): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his briefing. I also thank the other briefers, Mr. Gidon Bromberg and Ms. Nada Majdalani from EcoPeace, for their comments.

I welcome to this meeting His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine and the Ambassador for Israel to the United Nations.

Allow me, at the outset, to reiterate India's firm and unwavering commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Palestine issue. India supports a negotiated two-State solution leading to the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace

with Israel. India's developmental partnership with the Palestinian Authority in its nation-building efforts and our financial assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a reflection of that support.

I would like to focus on two key issues today: the urgent necessity for reversing the negative trends on the ground and the need for a road map for the resumption of direct political negotiations.

Resolution 2334 (2016) was adopted by the Council to reaffirm the international community's firm commitment to preventing the erosion of the two-State solution. It calls upon parties to prevent all acts of violence against civilians; stresses that all settlement activities must cease; and underscores the need to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues.

We remain deeply concerned by recent developments in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. Violent attacks on civilians have increased in recent weeks. Acts of destruction and provocation continue. New settlement units have been announced. We call upon the parties to immediately make concrete efforts to reverse those actions. Such unilateral measures unduly alter the status quo on the ground, undercut the viability of the two-State solution and pose serious challenges to the resumption of peace talks. They must be eschewed.

The international community must also send a strong signal against any step that would prevent the possibility of durable peace between Israel and Palestine in the near future. It is extremely important to prevent actions that undermine confidence-building measures.

The parties must focus on constructive measures. In that regard, we are encouraged by the expansion of direct contacts between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. The recent meeting between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli Minister of Defense, Benjamin Gantz, as well as the subsequent Israeli announcement to continue the advancement of socioeconomic measures in addition to those determined in their previous meetings, such as the advancing of the transfer of tax payments and status approvals and so on, are welcome developments.

Such initiatives, which are in the interests of both parties, help maintain stability and discourage the possible recurrence of terror and violence. The full and immediate implementation of those measures and

continued high-level interactions must be accompanied by a clear road map for the early resumption of direct negotiations on all final-status issues. We believe that to be the best path towards achieving the goal of a two-State solution.

India has consistently called for direct peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, based on the internationally agreed framework and taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for statehood and Israel's legitimate security concerns. The absence of such direct talks on key political issues has asymmetrical costs for both Israelis and Palestinians and does not augur well for long-term peace in the region. We call upon the United Nations and international community, in particular the Middle East Quartet, to prioritize the revival of those negotiations.

As a friend of Israel and Palestine, India will continue to support all efforts towards achieving a comprehensive and lasting two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and stands ready to contribute constructively to such efforts.

Before I conclude, let me also express my strong condemnation of the recent terror attack in Abu Dhabi in which two Indians tragically lost their lives. Such an attack on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure is completely unacceptable. It is a blatant violation of international law and also goes against all civilized norms. India stands in solidarity with the United Arab Emirates and extends its full support for an unequivocal condemnation of that terror attack by the Council. It is important that the Council stand united in sending a clear signal against such heinous acts of terror.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and the two briefers for their valuable information.

The Security Council has shown many times that it has the power to do great things when it galvanizes the collective will of its membership. But there is one issue that has proven itself to be hard to resolve, even for such a powerful collective organ as the Security Council: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Council has played a pivotal role in creating the international framework to resolve the conflict, but even after more than seven decades a solution does not appear to be in sight. As we have heard, as things stand now there is not even an active peace process or negotiations initiative, while the situation on the ground

remains volatile and risks producing new explosions of violence as we have seen time and again.

This is our first time speaking on this issue in our capacity as a member of the Council. We do not have the formula for the Council to achieve a just and lasting solution among the Israelis and the Palestinians. We do not take the moral high ground to lecture the parties in what is widely seen as a never-ending conflict. What we can offer is our own lived experience, namely, the way in which we have navigated our own path through existential threats, wars we did not choose and other serious challenges in order to come together and find ways to invest in understanding and cooperating with others, as we have done and do every day in our neighbourhood.

We have no other interest except our sincere desire to see the Israelis and Palestinians manage their differences and coexist in peace and harmony. Albania cherishes its historic friendship with the Jewish people — a friendship that has stood the test of the darkest hour of humankind. We stand firmly and unequivocally for the security of the State of Israel. We understand the security challenges that Israel faces on a daily basis. It is not easy for a country to feel secure when another country in the neighbourhood — a powerful country with a dangerously aggressive policy — advocates openly for the destruction of that country. It is hard to feel at peace while living under the constant threat of indiscriminate missile attacks, whether from the south or north of the country.

Israel has the legitimate right to defend itself, and we stand by it on this issue. That must be done in accordance with the law and with respect for human rights.

Let me add in that respect that we reiterate our full solidarity and support for the United Arab Emirates following the heinous attack by the Houthis on its soil.

But we also try to understand the daily lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank — their desperation, the lack of perspective and the dimming hope for a better future. Hope dies last, as the saying goes, and when there is no more hope, there is nothing left. That is to say, the status quo is unsustainable.

We continue to believe that the only viable and just solution is a negotiated two-State solution, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, with two States living



side by side, in security and in full respect of the rights of the respective populations, Israelis and Palestinians.

Trust is the most important ingredient for negotiations to resume and to succeed. That is why we call on both parties to do everything they can to create the necessary conditions and to refrain from any acts that go against that spirit.

We are encouraged by the small but welcome steps taken lately by the Israeli Government after the recent meeting between President Abbas and Minister Gantz, such as the increased number of employment authorizations from both the West Bank and Gaza, the transfer of tax payments and additional permits for businesspeople to enter Israel. But much more needs to be done, and more such steps and initiatives that help improve the climate, build trust and enable people to live in dignity, with enjoyment of their rights, are needed. In that respect, we remain of the opinion that the expansion of settlements is wrong, as it threatens that two-State reality and goes against the prospect of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We welcome the Abraham Accords. We want to believe that as relations between Israel and the Arab States improve considerably, that will also have an impact on relations between Israelis and Palestinians.

We support the preservation of the status quo regarding the Holy sites in Jerusalem. They are part of the shared heritage of the three great monotheistic religions that should be recognized and respected by all. It is a symbolic case of the need for mutual recognition, without which peaceful coexistence is unsustainable.

The concept of democracy would be mostly theoretical without a free and developed civil society. A strong and vibrant civil society is critical to empower people and plays a vital role in strengthening mutual understanding through people-to-people contacts and to counter prejudice, hatred and hostility.

Our concerns regarding the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations are well known. But we are also deeply concerned about the shrinking space for civil society in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, especially Hamas.

In conclusion, let me say that the Council's inability to find a solution should not discourage it from continuing to seek one. That means, as mentioned earlier, focusing on the people and supporting their aspirations here and now. That means doing all we

can to support processes and initiatives that enable people — everyone, Israelis and Palestinians both — to live in security and dignity, in peace and prosperity, with full and equal rights, in practice and not just in principle.

**Mr. De Rivière (France)** (*spoke in French*): I wish to welcome your presence among us today, Madam President. I wish also to thank the Special Coordinator. I extend thanks also to Mr. Bromberg and Ms. Majdalani for their statements.

It is incumbent on the Security Council to work to safeguard the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both. That solution was defined by the Council, and to date it is the only one that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, guarantee the security of all and foster a just and lasting peace.

The parameters of that solution are known. They must be implemented through negotiations between the parties on all final-status issues. That is a prerequisite for both Israelis and Palestinians to be in a position to provide fair and lasting solutions to the challenges that they face together.

France is deeply concerned about the ongoing weakening of the two-State solution, particularly as a consequence of ongoing settlement activities. We emphatically condemn the new plans adopted on 17 January, in particular the so-called lower aqueduct project, creating hundreds of new housing units east of the Green Line, specifically in East Jerusalem, between Givat HaMatos and Har Homa. That project imperils the geographical contiguity of a future Palestinian State and contributes to further cementing the ring of settlements separating East Jerusalem from Bethlehem.

We therefore call on the Israeli authorities to reconsider their decision and to definitively suspend their plans related to the creation of a new settlement in Atarot and those aimed at expanding Area E1.

We welcome the recent measures announced following the meeting between Prime Minister Gantz and President Abbas. They must, however, be accompanied by a freeze on unilateral measures.

Together with its European partners, France remains concerned by the record increase in settler violence, demolitions and evictions, particularly in East Jerusalem. We therefore condemn the recent demolitions and evictions in Sheikh Jarrah. We call



on the Israeli authorities to cease demolitions in East Jerusalem and in Area C.

France remains concerned by the persistent tensions on the ground and the precarious nature of the cessation of hostilities in Gaza. It is imperative that the necessary assistance and medical equipment reach Gaza, ensuring that they reach their recipients. In that regard, France recalls its full support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Israel must ensure the protection of all civilians, including Palestinians, in accordance with international law. It must ensure that investigations are carried out and that perpetrators are held accountable.

France is also concerned about the shrinking space in which civil society operates. The designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as terrorist organizations are of great concern. In the absence of evidence to substantiate allegations of misappropriation of funds or their support for or participation in terrorist activities, France will remain mobilized in support of those organizations and will continue to support them.

Violations of human rights and freedoms in the Palestinian territories are also of concern to us. We call for the ongoing investigation into the death in custody of Nizar Banat to be completed. We reiterate our call on the Palestinian Authority to renew the democratic legitimacy of its institutions, specifically through the holding of general elections. Robust democratic institutions based on respect for the rule of law are vital to a viable Palestinian State.

In that context, France calls on the Council to work to relaunch the political process, which has been stalled since 2014. It is key to recreating a political horizon that would make it possible to reverse current negative trends and thereby pre-empt a fresh cycle of violence. France will continue to work to that end, specifically with Germany, Egypt and Jordan.

**Mr. Kariuki** (United Kingdom): Before I start, I should like to stress that, as my Foreign Secretary has said, the United Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks of 17 January claimed by the Houthis against civilian sites in Abu Dhabi. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims.

Turning to the topic of today's discussion, my thanks go to the Special Coordinator for his briefing. I should like also to thank our two briefers from

EcoPeace. They have demonstrated today how climate and environmental impacts can be both a source of insecurity and a driver for cooperation between communities. The United Kingdom supports their call for greater regional cooperation on joint environmental threats. The solar/water agreement between Israel, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates in November illustrates the value of such efforts.

I want to pay tribute to Norway for its leadership on economic coordination between the parties, including chairing in November the first in-person meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in two years. Both parties committed there to enhancing dialogue and expressed a willingness to reinvigorate the long-stalled Joint Economic Committee. The United Kingdom calls on both parties to advance those goals, as we approach the upcoming meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in March.

The United Kingdom welcomes continued engagement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including direct meetings between Defence Minister Gantz and President Abbas and discussions between the Ministries of Finance aimed at improving the economic conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories. Such direct engagement is vital, given the scale of the current challenges. We urge Israel and the Palestinian Authority to accelerate efforts to improve the financial situation and the economic and humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and Gaza. We welcome the appointment of new Palestinian Ministers of the Interior and the Awqaf and continue to urge the Palestinian Authority to deliver reforms towards greater accountability, transparency and efficacy.

On 17 January, British diplomats witnessed the attempted eviction of the Salhiye family, who live and run a business in Sheikh Jarrah. Earlier this morning, authorities returned to demolish their home and arrested members of the family. We once again urge the Government of Israel to cease such policies. Evictions are against international humanitarian law in all but the most exceptional circumstances and cause unnecessary suffering. In addition, on 17 January, as we have heard, approval was given to the Lower Aqueduct settlement plan, representing nearly 1,500 housing units, some of which fall outside the Green Line, to be built between Givat Hamatos and Har Homa. We urge the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion

and settlement activity, which heightens tension and threatens the viability of a future Palestinian State.

The United Kingdom also condemns the attempted stabbing attack against an Israeli Defense Forces soldier in the West Bank on 17 January. That incident follows several attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers at the end of last year. We call for the parties to work together to condemn violence and minimize tension.

Stability in Gaza remains a focus for the United Kingdom. We condemn the firing of missiles from Gaza towards Israel at the start of January, and we urge all sides to work to sustain the calm.

We urge both parties to avoid unilateral actions harmful to peace, which risk undermining the engagement between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership, which I referenced at the beginning of my statement. We call on both parties to work together to create the foundations for future progress towards a two-State solution.

**Mr. Kiboino (Kenya):** I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his update. Kenya continues to acknowledge his work. I also thank the briefers and take note of the perspective that they have shared. I would also like to recognize the presence of the delegations of Israel and Palestine among us today.

With regard to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine, we see the central issue as that of human agency. Indeed, Israelis and Palestinians inhabit the same physical terrain. There are definitely immediate challenges that will need to be addressed with or without a political solution. That is part of the peacebuilding process, but we should not lose sight of human agency as a driver and sustainer of the protracted conflict.

Human agency is exemplified, among other things, by the lack of progress by the conflicting parties in meeting the agreed commitments as outlined in the relevant Security Council's resolutions and under international law. It also points to activities of extremist entities, particularly terrorist attacks and acts conducive to terrorism perpetrated by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other affiliated groups against Israeli civilians and civilian infrastructure, including the recent rockets attacks from Gaza on 1 January, which acts Kenya continues to condemn strongly.

Such human agency therefore necessitates the urgent need for both sides to sit down, engage in dialogue

and frame a negotiated peaceful settlement of the protracted conflict. That should remain the Council's premise of engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian situation. In that context, Kenya has repeatedly affirmed that one of the critical implementation steps for the actualization of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines is the constructive engagement with the challenges on the ground that factor in both political and economic performance.

We have regularly taken note of the progress made, particularly when it comes to cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians at all levels, including the economy and security matters. In that regard, we look forward to the operationalization of the practical outcomes of the 28 December 2021 meeting between Israeli Defence Minister Gantz and President Abbas — the second such meeting to take place the same year after a decade of no top-level meetings between either party. It is indeed welcome to note that, at the most recent meeting, the stated common interests included strengthening security coordination, preventing terrorism and violence and promoting confidence-building measures in the economic and civilian fields.

We believe that the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and demolitions, including those that pose a risk to the territorial contiguity of a viable Palestinian State, are also important peacebuilding and confidence-building measures and are critical to easing tensions and contributing to much-needed peace. Kenya has welcomed, and will continue to welcome, all constructive inter-ethnic and intercultural grass-roots efforts that contribute to harmonious coexistence, despite the current fragile situation on the ground.

On several occasions, we have called for the reinforcement of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and commended efforts by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, chaired by Norway, in the areas of institution-building and the development of the Palestinian economy. When it comes to financing in general, we believe that the important questions are: Who receives the money, and what is being funded?

The answer to those questions, including how, within the conflict situation, policymakers can engage with the current and next generation of financiers to

deliver on a more sustainable future for the conflict-affected communities, is worth pursuing. Kenya welcomes the progress that has been made by the Israeli Government in advancing financing with regard to clearance revenues in the West Bank and the easing of restrictions in Gaza, including the issuance of permits to traders. We note that the progress is gradual and much more needs to be done to ensure equitable economic advancement and recovery in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm that the resumption of a meaningful peace process will depend on human agency, that is, how Israelis and Palestinians live, work and cooperate on the path of peace and economic sustainability in the interim.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by offering our condolences to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for the victims of the unacceptable missile attack against civilian infrastructure in Abu Dhabi. My country firmly condemns that attack.

We welcome Norway's commitment to the Middle East peace process. We also welcome Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland to today's meeting and thank him for his very informative briefing. We followed with interest the briefings by Nada Majdalani and Gidon Bromberg on issues related to water sharing and advocacy on climate security.

As we assess the situation in the Middle East in the light of recent developments in the region, we note that, despite several efforts made to promote peace and stability in that region of the world, genuine prospects for peace and development remain in jeopardy because of ongoing violence and tensions. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of that tragic situation.

The year 2021 was marked in particular by the 11-day war between Israel and Hamas during the month of May, which left many dead or injured. The year 2022 began with the violation of an already fragile ceasefire — Israeli strikes on Gaza and rocket fire on Israel. The humanitarian and economic situation in the Palestinian territories remains disturbing. The unprecedented financial crisis facing the Palestinian Authority and the budget issues of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East increase the urgency of the situation faced by the international community. We therefore call upon all parties to show restraint and refrain from aggressive

rhetoric and unilateral actions, such as the settlement policy conducted by Israel and attacks on Israeli civilians, which will lead only to a further escalation of violence. Such acts are obstacles to the two-State solution and stability in the region.

Gabon calls for the revival of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for genuine and lasting peace, based on the application of the rules of international law. We support the vision of a Palestinian State coexisting with the State of Israel, within pre-1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. To revive such prospects, my country calls on the Middle East Quartet and all stakeholders in the region to intensify their efforts to encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resume dialogue in good faith. The dialogue should be inclusive and involve all segments of society, including women. The creation of a Palestinian State is indeed a key step in concluding the peace process. Such peace will have an impact on the entire region.

The futures of Israel and Palestine are inextricably linked. Therefore, only constant, earnest and direct dialogue between the parties will enable a lasting solution to be found to the conflict. That is why we welcome the historic meeting in Israel on 28 December 2021 between the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Minister of Defence, Benjamin Gantz. We hope that the outcome of that meeting will give new impetus to international efforts for lasting peace in the region.

**The President:** I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the microphone collars will prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close after four minutes.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

**Mr. Szijjártó** (Hungary): I thank you very much, Madam President, for convening our meeting today under such complicated circumstances to discuss this very important matter.

There is absolutely no doubt that the security of the Middle East has been one of the issues with the strongest and most comprehensive impact on global peace and security in past decades. We have all witnessed many attempts by several actors to resolve

the crisis. However, most of those attempts have either failed or had only limited impact.

The Abraham Accords, signed by Israel and numerous Arab States, represent the most significant result on the matter. Apart from normalizing bilateral relations between the States involved, the Abraham Accords may give new impetus to the Middle East peace process, as well to the much-awaited agreement between Israel and Palestine. Indeed, we hope that negotiations will be successful in that regard.

We are pleased to see the deepening ties between Arab countries and Israel, which we consider to be a game-changer in regional dynamics. Increased cooperation in important areas such as food security, health care and water management has genuine potential to increase long-term stability in the region. We recognize the role of former United States President Donald Trump in that regard. We strongly support the comprehensive implementation of the Accords, the accession of an ever-increasing number of States and the signing of further agreements. We remain committed to furthering this cause with all the means at our disposal, including our leverage within the European Union (EU).

I must state that we are often quite disappointed about the way in which Israel is treated, even in some of the committees and bodies of the United Nations. We are committed to a fair and more balanced approach concerning Israel. We reject all unilateral, unfounded and biased decisions to condemn Israel. Furthermore, we call upon the United Nations and its Member States to end the anti-Israel discussion and avoid discussing agenda items of that kind, as the purpose of such discussion is not to find a solution to the current situation but to blame only one side for the challenges in the region.

We must speak honestly. Israel has been faced with the tremendous threat of terrorism. We have to call the terrorist organizations, persons and entities concerned by name, as they pose a threat to Israel and its people. We believe that Israel has the right to self-defence and to protect its sovereignty and its citizens.

As a member State of the European Union, we consider Israel to be an ally of key importance in the region. That is why we often encourage closer relations between the EU and Israel in Brussels. We continue to call for the convening of the EU-Israel Association Council.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to an aspect that might explain why for us, Central Europeans, the security situation in the Middle East is so important. Past experiences in our region clearly show that a deteriorating security situation and instability in Middle East usually leads to waves of illegal migration, which often target Europe. Migrants reach Central Europe and cause major security-related challenges on our continent.

Let me also mention that we follow with great concern the rise of modern-day anti-Semitism in many parts of the world. The Government of Hungary has announced a zero-tolerance policy against anti-Semitism. We are proud of the fact that the largest Jewish community in Central Europe resides in Hungary. We are also proud that the security of that community is guaranteed by our Constitution and our authorities.

Lastly, I would like to mention that I am proud to represent a country founded on a 1,000-year-long Christian statehood. That is why Hungary feels and assumes responsibility for the security of Christian communities around the world. Unfortunately, we are witnessing ever-increasing persecution against Christians, who are becoming the most persecuted religious group in the world. Unfortunately, many Christian communities in the Middle East find themselves in dire situations because of persecution. I hope that the United Nations, the Secretariat and fellow States Members of the United Nations will join us in speaking up and standing up for the Christian communities in this region in the future.

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

**Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*):** I would like to begin by congratulating Norway for presiding over the Security Council this month and to thank you personally, Madam President, for presiding over today's meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his invaluable briefing, and to thank the other two briefers as well.

The Kingdom of Morocco, under His Majesty King Mohammed VI, presides over the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and attaches utmost importance to the Palestinian question and the rights of the Palestinian people. Stability and security in the Middle East stem from the just and comprehensive peace that would result from resolving this question



based on international legitimacy and the two-State solution agreed upon by the international community, whose aim is to create a viable Palestinian State within 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in full security, tranquillity and peace. The Kingdom of Morocco reiterates that negotiations between the two Palestinian and Israeli sides remain the only way to finding a final and lasting solution to this conflict.

In his recent address delivered on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, His Majesty King Mohammed VI called for intensive and active diplomatic efforts to encourage the parties to return to the negotiation table in order to reach a solution to the Palestinian question, specifically through the two-State solution and providing a promising future for generations of Palestinians and Israelis. I would like to stress that the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to play its valuable historical role in relation to the Palestinian question, while leveraging its positive relations with all parties and international stakeholders to create conditions conducive to relaunching the negotiations, which is the only way to establish security and stability in the Middle East.

The Kingdom of Morocco calls for the need to preserve Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in particular its unity and sanctity as well as its legal, cultural, historical and demographic status with its unique position as a city of peace. As Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, His Majesty King Mohammed VI will spare no effort to preserve the distinctive character of this Holy City. During the visit of Pope Francis to the Kingdom of Morocco, on 30 March 2019, His Majesty the King and His Holiness signed the Al-Quds Appeal, in which they stressed the need to preserve the Holy City as common heritage of humankind owing to its legal, historical and demographic status and its openness to all followers of the three monotheistic religions.

The Kingdom of Morocco has supported the brotherly Palestinian people, including by several initiatives, including the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Agency of the Al-Quds Committee, which the Kingdom sponsors for the benefit of the Palestinian people and in support of Palestinian institutions and for which it provides 87 per cent of its funding under direct supervision of His Majesty. Since its inception in 1998, the Agency has worked to protect the Arab and Islamic rights in the Holy City by supporting and funding several vital social, cultural, educational, health and construction projects and has had a direct and tangible impact on

its residents. According to the Agency's report, the total cost of programmes and projects adopted in 2021 amounts \$3.6 million, and, as I just mentioned, the Kingdom of Morocco covers 87 per cent of the cost.

The Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms the evil terrorist attack by the Houthis against Al-Mussafah and the Abu Dhabi airport, in the sisterly United Arab Emirates. Following that vicious attack, His Majesty King Mohammed VI called His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces in the United Arab Emirates, in which he strongly condemned that disgraceful act against innocent people and civilian facilities. His Majesty the King reiterated the support of the Kingdom of Morocco to all the steps taken by the United Arab Emirates to defend its territories and to ensure the peaceful life of its citizens against such attacks by Houthi militias and their supporters.

The Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its position of always fully supporting the sisterly United Arab Emirates and providing it with all kinds of support in defending its national security and protecting its citizens. We call upon the international community, especially the Security Council, to strongly condemn such terrorist attacks, which threaten regional and international peace and security, adopt strict measures to put an end to these attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable.

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

**Mr. Takht Ravanchi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate, posing a threat to international peace and security. During 2021, through the killing of innocent people, including women and children, the requisitioning of Palestinians' property, the seizure and demolition of their homes and their eviction by force, the Israeli regime has continued its oppressive and expansionist policies and unlawful criminal practices, including grave and systematic violation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in 2021, 341 Palestinians were killed, and 17,893 more were injured. The Israeli security forces also systematically killed Palestinian children: in 2021, 86 Palestinian children were killed in



the occupied Palestinian Territory, which is the highest number since 2014.

One example of the Israeli regime's brutalities was its 11-day all-out war on Gaza in May 2021, when Israeli forces killed 256 Palestinians, including 66 children and 40 women. These numbers include 13 members of an extended family, including children, one as young as six months of age, who were killed and buried in the rubble of their own home. These measures constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, for which the perpetrators must be brought to justice. Moreover, the seizure and demolition of Palestinian homes increased in 2021 in comparison to 2019 and 2020: 894 structures were demolished in 2021, which resulted in the displacement of 1,179 people.

By the same token, the Israeli regime continues its destabilizing and malicious activities in the region by consistently violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and by openly threatening to use force against other countries in the region. We condemn the Israeli malevolent policies and destabilizing activities, which are a clear threat to the peace and security of the region.

We also condemn the convening of the recent Israeli Cabinet meeting in the occupied Syrian Golan and its statement on building new settlements there. This unlawful action clearly constituted a flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. It is therefore null and void and without any legal effect on the status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which remains an integral part of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

The inaction of the Security Council has emboldened the Israeli regime to continue its crimes against the oppressed people of Palestine. The Security Council must obligate the Israeli regime to put an immediate end to its systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Council must also compel Israeli to end its occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories.

In conclusion, the representative of the Israeli regime has attempted once again today to misuse this forum and make unfounded allegations against my country, which are hereby totally rejected. These groundless accusations are designed to distract attention away from the atrocious, unrelenting brutalities committed by the Israeli regime in the occupied Palestinian

territory. It is indeed very ironic that a regime famous for its atrocities and apartheid policies, war crimes, crimes against humanity, attacks on or threats to use force against its neighbours and more — a regime with an atrocious record of developing, producing and stockpiling different kinds of inhumane weapons, including weapons of mass destructions — is now labelling others as a threat to peace and security and preaching others to observe international law.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Norway's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I wish you every success in steering the work of the Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing. I welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Palestine.

December 2021 marked five years since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which reaffirmed all principles contained in previous Council resolutions on the Palestinian question. The resolution also reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the importance of distinguishing between territories occupied in 1967 and those controlled now by Israel, the occupying Power. Five years have passed since the adoption of that resolution, and nearly 74 years since the Nakba of 1948, and 55 years since the An-Naksa of 1967. Nevertheless, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to deteriorate in an accelerated manner, in contravention of resolution 2334 (2016) and all previous Security Council resolutions on the matter.

Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are expanding at an increasing pace. Palestinian homes and structures, including those funded by donors in order to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, are being demolished. There are attempts to forcibly displace Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods in occupied East Jerusalem. The occupied Palestinian territory has witnessed more killings against the unarmed Palestinian people, especially children, by Israeli occupation forces

and settlers. Violations by settlers have increased in full view of the occupation forces, without the provision of any protection to the Palestinians.

In addition, Israel recently decided to designate six Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist organizations, even though they cooperate with international donors, notably the United Nations.

Furthermore, in May 2021, the occupied Palestinian territory witnessed serious escalation, which claimed the lives of 253 martyrs of unarmed civilians, including nearly 66 children and 39 women.

In the light of all that, the Group of Arab States calls upon the international community to provide international protection to the Palestinian people immediately.

We call for the occupying Power to end all illegal measures and all human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including attacking civilians, building settlements, forcibly displacing Palestinians, confiscating their land and demolishing their homes. We also call on the international community to pressure Israel to reverse its decision to designate Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist organizations. We call on countries and donors to ignore that designation and fabricated accusation and to continue to support those organizations.

The Group of Arab States once again calls for respecting the current historical and legal status in East Jerusalem and the custodianship by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The Arab Group values the ongoing efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, Custodian of the Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, to achieve peace and maintain the existing historical and legal status of the holy sites, especially the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The Arab Group also values the ongoing efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We welcome the signing of the Jerusalem Appeal by His Majesty and Pope Francis in Rabat on 30 March 2019, calling for Jerusalem to be the city of peace, fraternity, tolerance and coexistence among the followers of all three Abrahamic religions.

The Arab Group commends Algeria's support for the Palestinian Authority in the amount of \$100 million

in order to help it overcome the financial crisis. We commend President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who invited Palestinian factions to meet in Algiers in order to achieve unity. We value all steps taken to that end.

The Arab Group also values efforts by Egypt, under the leadership of His Excellency President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, to consolidate the ceasefire in cooperation with all stakeholders. Egypt also announced the allocation of \$500 million to rebuild the Ghaza Strip through projects carried out by Egyptian companies. Egypt also examined ways to resume negotiations by hosting a six-party meeting last month, with the participation of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and heads of intelligence agencies from Jordan and Palestine.

There is no doubt that the continued occupation will lead only to more escalation. The current situation cannot continue, as it is not conducive to the resumption of negotiations or to focusing instead on confidence-building measures, without a political process to end the occupation and achieve peace.

The Arab Group stresses the need to develop a vision to ensure respect for international law, to stop illegal unilateral measures and to resume negotiations as soon as possible. The Arab Group therefore calls for the holding of an international peace conference on the basis of the agreed terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution in order to put an end to the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian State along 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Arab Group calls for the activation of the Middle East Quartet at the ministerial level and for the Security Council to achieve a just solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of Security Council resolutions.

At the same time, we must continue to support the Palestinian people by supporting the Palestinian Government and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is still undergoing a severe financial crisis that is preventing it from fulfilling its mandate in service of Palestinian refugees.

While we strive to achieve regional stability and security by resolving all crises in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, the sisterly United Arab Emirates and its capital have been the target of a terrorist attack. The Arab Group condemns, in the strongest terms, the targeting by terrorist Houthi militias of civilians and civilian

infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates. We stress that the international community must be united in confronting this terrorist act, which threatens peace and security at the regional level.

In conclusion, the Arab Group stresses that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be achieved only by liberating the Arab territories that were occupied in 1967 — in Palestine, the Syrian Golan, the Shaba'a farmlands, the hills of Kfar Shuba and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and adjacent areas — by putting an end to all unilateral actions, including settlement activities, and by adhering to the resolutions of international legitimacy, at the forefront of which are United Nations resolutions and the Charter, especially the right to self-determination and respect for the sovereignty of States as well as regional integration and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States.

In the interest of time, Egypt will not deliver its national statement.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

**Mr. Abdelaziz** (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin my statement by congratulating Norway on presiding over the Security Council for the month of January and by personally welcoming you, Madam President, along with the ministers present and the new members of the Security Council. I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his exceptional briefing today and for his tireless efforts as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The League of Arab States aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Group of Arab States in New York.

We would also like to emphasize the strong condemnation of the Arab League and its Secretary-General of the terrorist attack by the Houthi militias two days ago targeting vital facilities in the United Arab Emirates and leading to civilian casualties.

Despite the adoption of terms of references in Madrid, Oslo and Annapolis and of Security Council resolutions pertaining to the principle of land for peace as a main term of reference for the peace process, we continue to see tireless efforts being made by the new Israeli Government to change this principle into “peace

for peace” instead of “land for peace” by gradually strengthening relations with the Arab States while simultaneously continuing to violate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including continued violation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), by increasing its settlement and colonial activities in order to change the reality on the Palestinian ground and by providing military protection to settlers and joining in their monstrous attacks against unarmed Palestinian people while confiscating their territories and properties and forcefully displacing them in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and other areas, in violation of all international laws and norms.

The new Israeli Government is also illegally designating civil society organizations that defend the rights of the brave Palestinian people as terrorist organizations, which is also a violation of all international human rights norms. Without a doubt, the claim of the new Israeli Government that it cannot change the vicious settlement policy of the previous Government and that it is unwilling to make any compromises in peace negotiation processes cannot be justified by the fragility of the Israeli Government's coalition or the fear that such compromises would threaten the survival of the current Government. The international community, in particular the Security Council, will not be fooled by such claims. The Council strongly insists on a genuine negotiation process between Israel and Palestine, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State pursuant to the principle of the two-State solution, which has been internationally agreed. That requires the Security Council to shoulder special responsibilities in important main areas that need effective international action, including the following.

First, the benefits of the Middle East Quartet must be maximized by holding ministerial meetings to prepare for direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, leading to an international conference for peace, as requested by President Mahmoud Abbas to the Secretary-General in his repeated statements before the Council in 2018 and 2019 and before successive sessions of the General Assembly.

Secondly, unarmed Palestinians must be provided maximum protection from the oppression of the occupation authorities and armed settlers supported by them, by holding Council meetings to consider the report of the Secretary-General that was submitted to the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly in

August 2018 (see A/ES-10/794), which includes clear protection options for the Palestinian people.

Thirdly, maximum support must be provided to Palestinian refugees everywhere through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, while guaranteeing the access of Palestinian refugees to its services in all host countries and working to fill its funding gaps and increase voluntary contributions from donor countries and organizations. In that regard, the League of Arab States commends the work of the conscientious Norwegian leadership of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians to that end.

Fourthly, a double standard must not be applied and Israel must be held accountable for all violations against the Palestinian people. As stressed by Minister Al-Malki today, prejudice actions must be eliminated, especially when addressing Israeli human rights violations. If they are not deterred, they could bring back scenes of apartheid and genocide, which we have all denounced in Council and General Assembly resolutions. We have all committed to applying the principle of “never again” to such atrocities against any people, in particular an occupied people.

Fifthly, the Security Council must ensure respect for the historical and legal status of East Jerusalem and support the Jordanian custodianship of the holy sites, including the Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Sixthly, Palestinians’ ability to achieve national reconciliation must be promoted and national elections must be held as soon as possible while all reconstruction and economic development efforts must be supported. As mentioned by Ambassador Greenfield of the United States of America in that regard, all current Council members have diplomatic relations with Israel and they must use them to complete the formal visit of the Council to the occupied Palestinian territories, for which we have been calling for years, to no avail, in order to bear witness to the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation and advance peace efforts.

The League of Arab States is fully prepared to support any action by the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Middle East Quartet and other peace-loving parties to resume direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel with a view to establishing an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital along June 1967 borders.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

**Mr. Skoog:** I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania align themselves with this statement.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, and with Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. The EU welcomes high-level contacts between the parties, including in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on 17 November. We call for the immediate implementation of the commitments made to improve Palestinian livelihoods and further engagement between the parties to renew confidence and to restore a political horizon and open the path towards the relaunching of the peace process as soon as possible.

The EU reiterates the imperative to consolidate the ceasefire in Gaza and recalls its unequivocal position that rocket fire, the launching of incendiary devices and other attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups are unacceptable. The EU welcomes the easing of some restrictions on Gaza, but as the measures taken so far have shown to be insufficient to allow rapid stabilization and recovery, it calls for further lifting of restrictions, underlining the need for unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza. The EU calls on all parties to take necessary steps to produce a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel’s legitimate security concerns.

The EU urges both parties to demonstrate their stated commitment to a two-State solution through concrete actions and to avoid unilateral actions, which threaten it.

The EU’s opposition to Israel’s settlement policy and actions taken in this context, including in East Jerusalem, and especially in sensitive areas, such as Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and E1, is well known. We reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and call to halt all settlement activities. Such



actions as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation — including of EU-funded projects — evictions, forced transfers, including of Bedouins, illegal outposts, settler violence and restrictions of movement and access severely threaten the two-State solution and will only escalate an already tense environment. The EU is concerned about demolitions and evictions, including in East Jerusalem. It will be important not to proceed with any planned demolitions, evictions or settlement expansion.

The EU condemns the recent increase in acts of violence, including in East Jerusalem; firmly condemns settler-related incidents; and calls for accountability. We recall the special significance of the holy sites, and call for upholding the status quo put in place in 1967 for the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif in line with previous understandings and with respect for Jordan's special role. The EU will closely monitor developments and their implications on the ground, and remains ready to take further action to protect the viability of the two-State solution.

We welcome the start of the cycle of local Palestinian elections on 11 December as a step towards national elections, and we reiterate our call on the Palestinian Authority to organize the postponed elections without further delay. Strong, inclusive, accountable and functioning democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are vital for the Palestinian people, for democratic legitimacy and, ultimately, for the two-State solution.

We urge all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process, adhere to previous agreements, renounce violence and terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and commit to democratic principles, including the rule of law. Palestinian civil society must be allowed to carry out its important task free from obstruction, harassment or intimidation by any party. The EU expects a full independent investigation into the death of Nizar Banat and that those responsible will be held to account.

The EU calls for the fundamental right to freedom of expression to be upheld, including in areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union is proud of its continued support to civil society, which contributes to peace efforts and confidence-building between Israelis and Palestinians.

Until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee issue in accordance with international law is found, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains crucial for providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestine refugees and supporting peace and stability in the region. The EU will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operation, including in East Jerusalem. We call upon all partners to increase their contributions to UNRWA.

The conflict in Syria has endured for more than a decade. We remain committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State and recall that a sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine, inclusive political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women.

We wholeheartedly support the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen to advance all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015), including with respect to the issues of detainees and missing persons at the hands of the regime and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held under United Nations supervision.

The EU calls on all participants, particularly the Syrian regime, to engage in good faith in the political process, including the Constitutional Committee. We have responded positively to the Special Envoy's initiative for a step-for-step approach to help move the political process forward.

By some estimates, up to 1,500 civilians have been killed in Syria in 2021 alone as a direct result of the conflict. Continued hostilities across Syria, provoked by various actors, render ordinary life impossible for the civilian population. The ceasefire agreed in March 2020 in the north-west must be upheld without reserve. The EU once again echoes the calls made by the Security Council for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire. Civilians must be protected at all times, and attacks on civilian objects, including hospitals, must cease.

The Syrian regime must fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, including in its investigations of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict. The EU continues to call upon the Syrian regime and its allies and upon all parties to

the conflict to cease indiscriminate air strikes and the shelling of civilians and humanitarian workers. The EU strongly condemns the recent attacks near Idlib.

All parties responsible for breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. The EU reiterates our call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court. Accountability and justice for victims is essential for a stable, peaceful Syria, based on a credible, inclusive and viable political solution in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

In the absence of international justice the prosecution of war crimes under national jurisdiction, where possible, which is now under way in several EU member States, represents an important contribution towards securing justice. The EU will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the work of the International Independent Commission of Inquiry.

Turkey is a key partner of the EU and a critically important actor in the Syrian crisis and the region. Turkey's security concerns in the north-east of Syria should be addressed through political and diplomatic means, and not by military action, in full respect of international humanitarian law.

The underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed under resolution 2254 (2015). The EU continues to warn against any further displacements in any part of Syria, as well as against the potential exploitation of such displacements for the purposes of social and demographic engineering. Conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of

origin, in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in accordance with international law, remain to be met. The EU will be in a position to support returns only once those conditions are satisfied.

Finally, humanitarian needs in Syria continue to increase, from 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020 to 14 million people at present. The EU and its member States are the largest donor and have provided over €25 billion to meet the needs arising from the crisis over the past decade. We will continue to demonstrate solidarity with the Syrian people and call on the other members of the international community to increase their commitments.

All parties must allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, including across conflict lines, to ensure that assistance reaches people in need by the most direct routes. Cross-border assistance will continue to be vital in the absence of adequate alternatives. The EU counts on the renewal in July of resolution 2585 (2021).

Early recovery projects are also important for the dignity of the Syrian people and for their future. The EU will not fund early recovery efforts that could support social and demographic engineering. The EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition in the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process is firmly under way.

We call once again on all parties to the conflict to advance a credible, sustainable and inclusive political solution based on the full and comprehensive implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). It is the only route to sustainable peace in Syria.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. With the concurrence of the members of the Security Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m.*