



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

*Provisional*

**9520<sup>th</sup>** meeting

Friday, 22 December 2023, 11.30 a.m.

New York

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. De La Gasca . . . . .	(Ecuador)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon . . . . .	Ms. Bouanga Ayouné
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 11.50 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

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

I propose that the Council invite the observer 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.

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

Members of the Council have before them document S/2023/1029, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Arab Emirates.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

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

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): Last week, a group of Security Council members travelled to the Rafah border. We saw first-hand the dire challenges that we have been discussing in this Chamber for more than two months now, and we met victims who endured and survived the hell unleashed on Gaza following the 7 October attacks on Israel. I will never forget meeting Mohammed, a boy who is almost the same age as my son, Laith. Like countless other children, he was recovering at the Al-Arish hospital from wounds caused by an Israeli air strike. He told me that he just wanted to go home and see his parents, and it was heartbreaking to hear from hospital staff that he had no idea that the strike that had wounded him had also killed every single member of his family.

The situation Council members saw at the Rafah border is unbearable. Thousands of trucks trying, and failing, to enter through a choke point, a crossing that was only ever intended to be for pedestrians. Nearly 1 million people are crammed into an area at the Rafah

border in Gaza where, before the war, there were less than 300,000. According to the World Food Programme, the food that has entered Gaza since the beginning of the conflict is only 10 per cent of what is necessary to sustain the population. Half of the people of Gaza are now starving. The United Nations has reported that the proportion of people going hungry in Gaza is higher than in any country in any conflict in the past 20 years. Given the desperate situation I have just described, which is being detailed by the Secretary-General to all United Nations agencies, things cannot possibly get any worse.

Let us be clear: in the coming period, unless we take drastic action, there will be famine in Gaza. This war and the unbearable price being paid by Palestinian civilians, 70 per cent of whom we know are women and children, is also having a significant impact on neighbouring countries. Regional spillover is a real possibility. We are seeing it already, including in the West Bank, where almost 300 Palestinians, including 75 children, have been killed. Egypt's efforts to mitigate the crisis on its border are admirable, but it needs help. It is not Egypt's problem alone. There must be an international response, and that is why the Council has been asked to urgently step in.

The text (S/2023/1029) is the product of extensive consultations and engagement among members of the Council and concerned parties, in particular Egypt and Palestine, for whose efforts we are especially grateful. The purpose of the text is very simple. It responds, with action, to the dire humanitarian situation on the ground for the Palestinian people bearing the brunt of this conflict, while protecting those who are trying to deliver life-saving aid, and it demands the urgent release of the hostages and for humanitarian access to address their medical needs. The draft resolution reaffirms that we are building on the important resolution 2712 (2023) and its provisions. It demands that the parties to the conflict allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to the Gaza Strip for the provision of humanitarian assistance. What that means is that all possible land, sea and air routes into Gaza must be utilized to allow life-saving aid to enter. That includes ensuring that the Kerem Shalom/Kerem Abu Salem crossing remains open in full, with the Council's backing. But even if trucks are going in at scale, if deconfliction does not happen, aid simply cannot reach those who need it. Current deconfliction efforts are

clearly not working if 136 United Nations workers have lost their lives because of the conflict.

That is why the text reaffirms that United Nations and humanitarian personnel, premises and consignments are protected and must not be attacked — a vital principle of international humanitarian law that has been repeatedly violated in this conflict. The text also calls for urgent steps to allow unhindered and critically expanded humanitarian access, and it also calls on the parties to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. We know that it is not a perfect text. We know that only a ceasefire will end the suffering, and that is why the United Arab Emirates put a draft resolution (S/2023/970) to a vote in the Council on Friday, 8 December (see S/PV.9498). Unfortunately, it failed to be adopted. On 12 December, 153 countries called for this in the General Assembly. Again, a ceasefire did not happen as a result of that call, although its significance in its moral clarity is clear.

The draft resolution that the United Arab Emirates has put in blue this morning responds to the calls for a sustainable cessation of hostilities and a massive scale-up of humanitarian aid. Often, in diplomacy, the challenge is meeting the moment in the world we live in, not in the world that we want, and we will never tire of pushing for a full humanitarian ceasefire. The draft resolution tasks the Secretary-General with appointing a senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator. Their mandate will be to monitor, verify and facilitate humanitarian relief to Gaza, and the draft resolution gives them the necessary resources and equipment to do so. The coordinator will establish a mechanism for accelerating the delivery of aid, and we expect the initial report on its work within 20 days. We have established similar mechanisms in other humanitarian crises. We have been watching scenes on our screens in recent weeks of civilians desperately scrambling in Gaza over basic necessities to live. That should be an alarm bell indicating a breakdown of civil order in Gaza. Not only is it morally abhorrent, but it is not in anyone's interest and could spiral unless we address it head on.

Many Governments, including those represented at this table, have made tremendous efforts to provide aid, funds and advanced negotiations regarding hostages, but until we pool efforts for an international response, we will not be able to manage the crisis sustainably. If the current situation continues, over the next few days, while we are safe at home with our loved ones during the festive period, civilians in Gaza will be dying either

from military strikes or the secondary impacts of war, hunger, disease and widespread infection. The Council has a responsibility to ensure that they are not victimized twice over. We have extensively negotiated and tried to find language that meets everyone's concerns, but also addresses the challenge with a practical response. I would like to thank each and every Council member who has contributed to, and improved, the text, and I would like to thank the United States for its complete engagement in trying to find a draft resolution that meets the moment. Let us not reject this draft resolution when the needs of the people are so great. If we do, it will be an additional responsibility that the Council and the Palestinian people will have to bear.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In the past few days, the Security Council, and with it the entire world, has witnessed the latest — and I am not afraid to use these words — shameful, cynical and irresponsible conduct by the United States, which is trying to avoid responsibility for the further use of the veto, resorting to all sorts of means of sabotaging the Council's adoption of a decision on Gaza.

This entire time, the world's media and the public have been wondering why the vote is constantly being delayed on the United Arab Emirates' proposed draft resolution, which was already put into blue. The answer is very simple: the United States, under various pretexts, has been dragging out the negotiating process, deviating from the normal transparent negotiating work. Instead, it has resorted to its favoured tactic of gross pressure, blackmail and twisting arms so that, at the last minute, it will be able to present the members of the Council with an ultimatum: either the Council adopts a text that is convenient for Washington, or the United States will once again block the adoption of any product.

The draft resolution that is now being put to a vote (S/2023/1029) was initially, in our view, entirely toothless. But, respecting the initiative of our Arab colleagues and their needs, we were ready to support it. Under pressure from the United States, which essentially intercepted the authorship and usurped work on the text behind the scenes at various levels, twisting the hands of those in the region, with each new drafting, the text lost more and more important provisions. Ultimately, the wording that is being put to a vote today has been extremely neutered, including its paragraph 4, on the mechanism that would be supposed to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and ensure its monitoring. But worse than all of that, through the

efforts of the American delegation, the draft resolution has included an extremely dangerous element for the future of Gaza. Instead of the wording on an immediate cessation of violence in paragraph 2, an ambiguous phrase has appeared, calling for the parties to create conditions for a cessation of hostilities.

The destruction, displacement or exile of the population of Gaza in a cynical reading — and that is precisely how it is going to be read in Israel — would also create the conditions for a cessation of hostilities. By signing off on that, the Council would in effect be giving the Israeli armed forces complete freedom of movement for further clearing of the Gaza Strip, and anyone who votes in favour of the text as it is currently worded would bear responsibility for that, essentially becoming complicit in the destruction of Gaza. Moreover, the reference in the text of the draft resolution to condemning all indiscriminate attacks on civilians has been removed. What signal will that send to the international community? It is that the Security Council is giving Israel a green light for war crimes.

I would like to put a question to members of the Security Council. Why do we gather here in the Chamber? Is it to rubber-stamp a decision that is convenient for Washington, or it is to fulfil our mandate to maintain international peace and security? We still believe that we are here for the latter. In order to give the Council a chance to save face and to preserve its reputation, which has been rather shaken in recent days, we propose to revert to the wording on the cessation of violence contained in the initial draft in blue. The Russian Federation proposes the following oral amendment to paragraph 2.

Instead of the wording

*(spoke in English)*

“and in this regard, calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities”,

*(spoke in Russian)*

we should add the wording

*(spoke in English)*

“and in this regard, calls for an urgent suspension of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access and for urgent steps towards a sustainable cessation of hostilities”.

*(spoke in Russian)*

That wording was in the text of the draft resolution that had been put into the blue by the authors and was awaiting a vote. Of course, it is not ideal. All Council members are well aware that from the very beginning Russia has consistently defended the need for an immediate ceasefire. The General Assembly recently called on the parties to do the same in its resolution ES-10/22. However, we are proposing wording that at the moment is the lowest common denominator for nearly all members of the Council. Let the vote on this amendment be a moment of truth to show which members of the Security Council want to end violence in Gaza and save civilian lives and which are guided by opportunistic considerations.

The way that the text of paragraph 2 is currently worded is the main thing that the United States needs from this resolution. Under the cunning phrase containing the words “creating the conditions for a cessation of hostilities”, Israel would be given free reign for further, non-time-limited, entirely unrestrained, indiscriminate bombings of civilian infrastructure and the civilian population of Gaza. We urge delegations to vote in favour of the language we have just proposed to paragraph 2 on ending violence, as initially proposed by the delegation of the United Arab Emirates.

**The President** *(spoke in Spanish)*: Members of the Council have before them a proposed oral amendment, submitted by the Russian Federation, to the text of the draft resolution contained in document S/2023/1029.

Rule 36 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure states, inter alia, the following:

“when an amendment adds to or deletes from the text of a motion or draft resolution, that amendment shall be voted on first.”

Accordingly, I intend to put the proposed oral amendment to the vote first.

*A vote was taken by show of hands.*

*In favour:*

Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Malta, Mozambique, Russian Federation, United Arab Emirates

*Against:*

United States of America

*Abstaining:*

Albania, Japan, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The proposed oral amendment received 10 votes in favour, 1 against and 4 abstentions. The proposed oral amendment has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a statement.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I am not going to respond Russia's rant — a country that has also created conditions that it is complaining about now in its unprovoked war in Ukraine. As colleagues can see, the United States did not support the oral amendment put forward by Russia. We believe that the humanitarian draft resolution before us (S/2023/1029) calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. This is a strong step forward, and we believe that the Security Council should speak out though the draft resolution that has been put before us and move forward with a vote on it.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

*A vote was taken by show of hands.*

*In favour:*

Albania, Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

*Against:*

None

*Abstaining:*

Russian Federation, United States of America

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2720 (2023).

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

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): This was tough, but we got there. Since the

start of this conflict, the United States has done work tirelessly to alleviate this humanitarian crisis, to get life-saving assistance into Gaza and to get hostages out of Gaza, to push for the protection of innocent civilians and humanitarian workers and to work towards a lasting peace. Today's vote bolsters those efforts and lends support to our direct diplomacy. I want to thank the United Arab Emirates and others for working with us in good faith to craft a strong humanitarian-focused resolution. It took many days and many long nights of negotiating to get this right. But today the Security Council provided a glimmer of hope among a sea of unimaginable suffering. Today the Council called for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. I will note that this is the first time the Council has used that language — language we believe is critical to scaling up aid and underscoring the tough steps ahead as we work together to achieve a lasting peace.

Today the Council has made clear that addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza needs to remain at the forefront of our agenda. Today the Council has made clear that all hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally and that humanitarian groups must be able to access hostages, including for medical visits. Today the Council has made clear that all parties must respect international humanitarian law. Today the Council has made clear that civilian and humanitarian facilities, including hospitals, medical facilities, schools, places of worship and United Nations facilities, as well as humanitarian personnel and medical personnel, must be protected. That applies to all parties to this conflict, to Israel but also to Hamas, a terror group that instigated this conflict and that wages war from inside homes, hospitals and United Nations sites and uses innocent civilians as human shields, an act of cowardice and cruelty.

Today the Council made clear the need to ensure that humanitarian personnel and assistance — including fuel, food, medical supplies and emergency shelter assistance — can reach people in need. It is hard to overstate how urgent that is. Just yesterday, humanitarian groups released a report on the dire food security crisis in Gaza. And the word famine has started to enter the vocabulary of humanitarian leaders I have met with. Surgeries are being performed without anaesthesia. People are huddled in overcrowded United Nations shelters; others are sleeping in the streets. This



resolution speaks to the severity of this crisis, and it calls on us all to do more.

For our part, the United States has worked tirelessly to scale up the delivery of humanitarian aid through direct, persistent presidential diplomacy. In the beginning of this conflict, we helped secure an agreement to open the Rafah crossing. Last month, we helped secure a deal that led to an extended humanitarian pause, during which more than 100 hostages were released and additional aid got into Gaza. And last week, we helped secure the opening of the crossing at Kerem Shalom for direct delivery of assistance to civilians in Gaza. This resolution puts the weight of the Security Council behind those efforts and bolsters them by calling for the appointment of a senior United Nations official who will work to expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid at scale and in a sustained way.

We know humanitarians are already doing the impossible, and we are there to do everything in our power to support their life-saving work. It is vital that, when implementing this resolution, the United Nations builds on the progress we have seen on the ground. And we look forward to this new official working with humanitarian actors and relevant parties, including Israel.

We know much more needs to be done to address this humanitarian crisis and to lay the groundwork for a lasting peace. And let us be clear: Hamas has no interest in a lasting peace. Hamas is determined to repeat the horrors of 7 October over and over and over again, and that is why the United States supports Israel's right to protect its people from acts of terror. And I will note that the resolution does not support any steps that would leave Hamas in power, which in turn would undermine the prospects for a two-State solution where Gaza and the West Bank are reunited under a single governance structure, under a revamped and revitalized Palestinian Authority. We must work towards a future where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in peace. That is the only way forward.

Ultimately, while we are encouraged that the Council spoke out on this humanitarian crisis, we are deeply disappointed — appalled actually — that once again the Council was not able to condemn Hamas's horrific terrorist attack on 7 October. I cannot understand why some Council members are standing in the way and why they refuse to condemn these evils unequivocally. Why is it so hard to condemn Hamas

for slaughtering young people at a concert, for burning families alive and for the reports of widespread sexual violence? I will never understand why some Council members have remained silent in the face of such evil. But we also believe the Council must continue to put its support behind the resumption of humanitarian pauses. Israel has made clear that it is committed to reaching another agreement. This is now entirely up to Hamas. Hamas must agree to additional pauses. That is how we can get additional aid in, save lives and get additional hostages out immediately.

Today the Council spoke out, but we know that only progress on the ground can turn these words into action. The United States will continue to work with the United Nations, humanitarian groups and countries in the region to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza, to secure the release of hostages and to work towards a lasting peace. There is no time to waste. We must find a path forward to end the misery we are seeing. It is unbearable to see a Palestinian child shivering in fear after their home was destroyed. It is unbearable to see the families of hostages experience such pain and grief as they frantically await and pray for their loved ones to return. My heart is filled with pain, and I know the same is true for many people around the world. We must work together to alleviate this tremendous suffering once and for all.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023) to get more aid into Gaza. As my Foreign Secretary has said, it is heartbreaking to see children in the rubble of their destroyed homes, not knowing where to find food or water, not knowing where their parents are. It is also heartbreaking to hear the stories of families who still do not know the whereabouts of their loved ones who were brutally taken on 7 October. And it is heart-wrenching to know that aid is piling up outside Gaza but not getting to the people that need it when we hear daily warnings that people are starving, disease is spreading and basic health care is lacking.

The United Kingdom is doing everything we can to get more aid in. We have tripled United Kingdom aid to the region. We were the first country to call on Israel to open more crossings. The United Kingdom has experts on the ground providing logistical support at Al-Arish, in Egypt. And today we supported this resolution, which will streamline aid checks so we can massively scale up the humanitarian response. It demands the immediate

and unconditional release of hostages, and it calls for steps towards a sustainable cessation of hostilities.

For the avoidance of doubt, we are clear that the resolution is without prejudice to the rights and obligations of the parties under international humanitarian law. The adoption is an important signal of the Security Council's commitment. Our actions today, and in the future, must help ensure that the horror of 7 October never happens again. We unequivocally condemn Hamas's acts of terror and support Israel's right to self-defence. My Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have been loud and clear in their calls for a sustainable ceasefire, as soon as possible. But a ceasefire will not last if Hamas is still able to operate in tunnels and to launch rocket attacks.

Our commitment to Israel's security is firm, as Israel deals with the threat from Hamas. Ultimately, we support a two-State solution that guarantees true security and stability for both Israeli and Palestinian people. We also thank the United Arab Emirates for their leadership on this resolution. Just this week, my Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Middle East travelled to Jordan and Egypt to make sure that we are supporting every effort to get aid in faster, and we will keep working with all partners to deliver a humanitarian response that meets the huge level of need.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): Brazil welcomes today's adoption of resolution 2720 (2023). We thank the United Arab Emirates for tirelessly conducting and facilitating the negotiations and also for organizing the trip to Rafah, which made possible a first-hand account of the challenging humanitarian work being carried out in the region.

This terrible crisis tests our humanity daily. The time for a humanitarian response to the suffering of civilians in Gaza is now — not tomorrow and not when this conflict finally ends. After more than 70 days of hostilities, the situation in Gaza is dire. The remaining hostages must be released immediately. Civilians and civilian facilities must be protected. That is not just a moral or ethical choice, it is an obligation under international humanitarian law, as is humanitarian access.

The amount of aid allowed into Gaza must be substantially increased to meet the needs of the people who depend on it throughout Gaza and should contain all essential items, including fuel. Egypt's efforts to facilitate the use of the Rafah crossing by United

Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners has been crucial. We welcome the recent announcement by Israel of the opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing for the direct delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Brazil calls for the full implementation of the adopted resolutions. Today's resolution provides for a monitoring mechanism for the United Nations to inspect the delivery of aid. The United Nations must be provided with the necessary means to carry out that task. The aim is to increase and expedite the entry and delivery of much-needed international assistance. The Council must remain seized of the matter for as long as it takes.

Since this is probably our last formal meeting during our current mandate, I would like to thank all members of the Council for the trust and cooperation extended to our delegation during these two years. I speak on behalf of my entire delegation and my capital in expressing how much we have appreciated working with all Council members at different levels and on a vast array of very important topics on the United Nations peace and security agenda. We end our term with a sense of accomplishment of the priorities that Brazil always sets when discharging its duties at the United Nations in general, and as a non-permanent member of the Council. We tried our best to engage constructively with all delegations in order to achieve concrete results in this vast and complex agenda of international peace and security in an increasingly complex and challenging world. Our Foreign Minister's participation in five Council meetings in October and November on the Palestine question illustrates the importance we attach to the Council and to the matters under its consideration. We championed our positions while respecting the diversity of values, opinions and interests within the Council in order to adequately fulfil our role as a non-permanent member for the eleventh time in the Council's history.

Once again, with President Lula's leadership and personal involvement, Brazil tried hard to make a serious contribution to that collective effort by just being Brazil, the Brazil that is back — a country that talks to every country in the friendliest way; that has no quarrels except with poverty, inequality, inhumanity and injustice; that has an engaged interest in all important matters discussed in the United Nations; that builds bridges, seeks consensus, acts faithfully as an honest broker and values and defends peace,

international law, multilateralism and their synthesis and symbol, the Charter of the United Nations. Most of all, if I may borrow Lincoln's words, it is a country that acts with malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right. And if I may add a personal note, I am most thankful for this six-month crash course in multilateral affairs in this worldly classroom. My dear colleagues and their teams have all been wonderful teachers to this old bilateralist, who hopes to have learned at least some of the most multiple skills and statesmanship that they exhibit here every single session.

**Mrs. Frazier (Malta):** Malta thanks the United Arab Emirates for taking the initiative to work on resolution 2720 (2023). I express our appreciation to Ambassador Nusseibeh and her team for their valiant efforts and for organizing the very important trip to Rafah.

Malta has consistently expressed grave concern and sought to alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Over the past three months, that humanitarian crisis has been severely aggravated by the obstruction of adequate emergency humanitarian aid and personnel, food and water into Gaza. The untenable situation required our urgent attention. That is why we have voted in favour of this text, and we demand its full implementation and that of resolution 2712 (2023).

However, we remain firm in our belief that an immediate ceasefire is the only tangible and realistic measure that can ease the suffering and extreme hardship of the Gazan people. We reiterate that all parties must comply with their obligations under international law, including those regarding the protection of civilians and civilian sites, with accountability for those who violate them. Medical and humanitarian personnel and their assets must be protected to allow the population safety, reprieve and dignity in times of acute crisis and anguish. We are already much too late.

We welcome the establishment of an aid monitoring mechanism for Gaza, as outlined in this resolution. However, its implementation must not add an additional barrier or slow down the principled delivery of humanitarian assistance. On the contrary, it should rapidly and efficiently facilitate it. We expect that the technical expertise and vast experience of the United Nations will direct the implementation of this mechanism, in coordination with relevant States. Without that, the desperately needed United Nations humanitarian response will be placed in jeopardy,

and the United Nations and humanitarian response be placed at great risk.

In conclusion, the end of hostilities must also be accompanied by a political urgency to build a durable foundation for peace. We welcome the resolution's clear and unwavering commitment to the two-State solution, in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters.

**Mr. Dai Bing (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): This repeatedly postponed Security Council vote today has received extensive attention by all. Over the past few days, in order to maximize consensus, the delegation of the United Arab Emirates made tireless efforts and resubmitted the draft resolution late last night. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023), which was put to a vote just now.

For reasons known to all, quite a number of adjustments on important aspects of the resolution have been made, and those adjustments are not consistent with the efforts we made and do not meet our expectations. At the same time, given the urgency of the situation on the ground and given the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza that is getting more dire by the day, the Council's present action offers at least a glimmer of hope for more and faster delivery of humanitarian supplies to Gaza. Of course, whether that glimmer of hope can be truly felt by the people of Gaza in the midst of the disaster also depends on whether the resolution can be effectively implemented and whether the relevant provisions of the resolution can be carried out without compromise.

We expect urgent actions to be taken pursuant to the Council resolution to expand humanitarian assistance to Gaza, including by making full use of the Kerem Shalom crossing and the opening of additional crossings to ensure the safe and unimpeded entry of sufficient humanitarian supplies into Gaza.

We hope that the monitoring mechanism newly provided for in the resolution will be put in place as soon as possible. We look forward to the Secretary-General's timely reporting to the Council on the implementation of the resolution. The Council should stand ready to take further actions at any time to resolve the problems and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the resolution.



The resolution reaffirms that all parties to the conflict must comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We urge Israel to immediately reverse its course, cease its indiscriminate military attacks and stop its collective punishment of the population of Gaza. As the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to safeguard the humanitarian needs of the population of Gaza and to guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers in Gaza.

It should be observed that the realization of a ceasefire remains the overriding prerequisite. Only a ceasefire can prevent greater casualties of civilians, including hostages; only a ceasefire can prevent the regional conflict from spiralling out of control and only a ceasefire can prevent the prospects for a political settlement from being completely destroyed. That is the reason why we voted in favour of Russia's amendment. We regret that the amendment was vetoed.

Going forward, China would like to work with all Council members to promote further responsible and meaningful action by the Council in a timely manner and to continue to make unrelenting efforts to bring an end to the fighting in Gaza to effectively implement the two-State solution and to realize peace and stability in the Middle East at an early date.

**Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan): The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza needs urgent attention and meaningful action by the Council. Therefore, we are deeply grateful for the United Arab Emirates and our friends in the Group of Arab States for their constructive engagement with all Council members to that end.

Japan voted in favour of resolution 2720 (2023). Given the deepening humanitarian crisis, it is indispensable to immediately scale up emergency assistance to and throughout Gaza. There is no safe place for the people in Gaza, and they cannot wait any longer for the Council to act. We also demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Therefore, we are pleased that the Council finally adopted another resolution today to address urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza, and we hope that will be a first step towards real change on the ground.

Full-fledged but sensitive diplomacy is under way to further scale up emergency humanitarian assistance to Gaza. In that vein, we highly appreciate the serious diplomatic efforts that the United States has been

conducting in the region to improve the situation on the ground. The entry of humanitarian convoys into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing is one of the results of those efforts, but more needs to be done.

Japan, as a responsible member of the Security Council, remains committed to addressing the devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Even now, gunfire and bombardment continue, and that must stop immediately for a period that allows for meaningful humanitarian operations to aid those who are enduring the grave humanitarian catastrophe and suffering.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland voted in favour of resolution 2720 (2023) and welcomes its adoption.

I would like to thank the delegation of the United Arab Emirates and all colleagues — Council members, as well as colleagues from the region — for their tireless efforts to find a compromise in order to alleviate the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. It is essential that the Council speak out in favour of the protection of civilians.

The images of the Rafah crossing clearly show that the civilian population is desperate. It needs the immediate support of the international community to survive. While such a compromise, by its nature, falls far short of many expectations, the adoption of the resolution, like the opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing, is a contribution to that end. The resolution provides for a humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator post to establish a United Nations mechanism that should allow all the necessary flexibility to expedite and streamline the process and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need as quickly as possible.

Switzerland welcomes the agreement reached by the Council, which should contribute to an effective implementation of life-saving humanitarian aid on the ground. With the same aim of facilitating rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, the resolution calls for the creation of conditions for a lasting ceasefire, without prejudice to Israel's right to ensure its defence and security. That should make it possible to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages who have been held since the terrorist attacks of 7 October, which Switzerland firmly condemned.

Today's resolution must be complementary to international humanitarian law, according to which all parties to the conflict, as well as non-warring States,

have the obligation to authorize and facilitate rescue operations for populations in need.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): We commend the United Arab Emirates as penholder and others involved from the region and from outside for the tremendous efforts to bring forward resolution 2720 (2023), which we just adopted.

We welcome the adoption of that important resolution and consider it an important step forward in dealing with the urgency of the dire situation in Gaza.

We would have liked a more robust text, including on some important key issues that are missing there, but the text has clear merits, which guided our position. And we welcome the establishment of a clear and straightforward mechanism to allow unhindered access for humanitarian assistance at scale to the population in Gaza and make a real difference on the ground.

People in Gaza are going hungry. They need assistance. Countless families are in dire need. They must be helped now, today and every day.

Therefore, it is urgent for the United Nations to step up, and that is all the resolution provides for — urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access at scale and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. We call for and look forward to the speedy and full implementation of the resolution.

But we want to be clear: we support the cessation of hostilities with the aim of saving civilians, helping innocent Palestinians to rebuild their lives, all those who are trapped in a bloody conflict — children, women and entire families — everyone who does not deserve to suffer or die.

Therefore, our vote in favour cannot and must not be seen, understood or misused by Hamas in any way or any circumstance, directly or indirectly, as condoning the unacceptable and the unjustifiable and its continued use of what belongs to and should go only to the people of Gaza, to plan and attack Israel and its population, as it has been doing since 7 October.

All Palestinians must unite under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, pursue the path of peace and negotiations and use all political means to build their future, have their State and ensure their freedom and dignity, living together and alongside Israel in security. That is a clear position we have expressed repeatedly

over the past two years, and it is one of the key wishes and hopes that we will keep with us as we exit the Security Council.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): France thanks the United Arab Emirates for preparing resolution 2720 (2023) and appreciates its efforts throughout the negotiations process. France welcomes the adoption today of a resolution that makes it possible to respond to the humanitarian emergency on the ground and improve the delivery of aid to Gaza, where the humanitarian crisis worsens by the day.

We all saw the reports yesterday of a serious risk of famine in Gaza. The Secretary-General sounded the alarm over the ongoing humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. It is urgent to deliver more humanitarian aid to the civilian population of Gaza, who need it more than ever. The resolution calls for urgent measures to be taken to create the conditions for a lasting cessation of hostilities.

We would have preferred if the Council could have expressed itself in a more ambitious manner on the subject. Since the start of the conflict, France has advocated an immediate, lasting humanitarian truce that should lead to a lasting ceasefire. Like resolution 2712 (2023), the resolution adopted today once again calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. Both resolutions must be immediately respected and implemented, just like international law more broadly.

Resolution 2720 (2023) is also in line with France's efforts to mobilize the international community in the face of the scale of the crisis, including during the international humanitarian conference held on 9 November, which made it possible to collect more than €1 billion in pledges.

It is for those reasons that France voted in favour of the resolution.

The French President and the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs have been travelling in the region in recent days. In Jordan yesterday, the President supported the creation of a humanitarian platform. He reiterated the crucial importance of working immediately towards a ceasefire. Only a ceasefire will allow the reopening of an essential political horizon.

France recalls that international humanitarian law must be applied in all circumstances and that full, safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian actors must be

guaranteed. We must protect humanitarian personnel, as well as medical and hospital staff.

The text must now be fully implemented.

The Council must also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that were committed by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October, including the sexual violence used to dehumanize and terrorize victims. It is incomprehensible that the Council has still not been able to do so — yet it must, as law and morality demand it.

France will continue to resolutely commit to the full mobilization of the Council on all aspects of the security, humanitarian and political crisis. France recalls the urgency of better protecting the lives of Palestinian civilians and contributing to a rapid end to the crisis based on the two-State solution — the only path towards building a just and lasting peace.

**Mr. Fernandes** (Mozambique): I wish to begin by expressing our sincere appreciation to the United Arab Emirates for its tireless work leading to the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023), which is aimed at responding to the humanitarian catastrophe currently unfolding in Gaza.

Mozambique's vote in favour of the resolution reflects our strong commitment to the principle of the protection of civilians, whether currently in Gaza or during any armed conflict. We are mindful of the fact that, while the resolution is not a perfect text, it clearly states the basic principles that must guide the parties and that ought to be upheld by world at large.

As the Secretary-General has said and as international law asserts, even wars have laws that must be observed. In that connection, the resolution emphasizes the importance of international humanitarian law and humanitarian access. It is an effort to respond to the critical role of humanitarian personnel in providing aid to civilians affected by the conflict. Mozambique's position is aligned with the global efforts to safeguard civilians and uphold their rights during times of conflict.

Together with other members of the Security Council, in our national capacity, we visited a hospital in Rafah and the Rafah border crossing. We could see with our own eyes and feel with our own hearts the tragedy that has befallen the Palestinian people. We therefore strongly believe that resolution 2720 (2023) is an important step towards alleviating the humanitarian

needs of the Palestinian civilian population throughout the Gaza Strip.

Civilians in Gaza need sufficient food, water, sanitation, electricity, telecommunications and medical services for their immediate survival. By voting in favour of the resolution, we emphasize the critical need for urgent humanitarian aid to reach civilians in Gaza during the ongoing conflict. The situation is dire and immediate action is necessary to prevent further humanitarian suffering. We reiterate the urgency of that demand to the parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate access by all possible means and of all forms of humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza.

The resolution is also crucial to operationalize the implementation of resolution 2712 (2023). However, the best alternative for peace to prevail in the Gaza Strip remains a durable and sustained cessation of hostilities and the return to a constructive dialogue between the parties. We reiterate Mozambique's call for dialogue between Israel and Palestine. In the midst of long-standing tensions, open communication remains essential for the negotiated settlement of conflicts. We hope that both parties will heed that call and work towards a constructive dialogue that can pave the way for understanding and reconciliation.

We strongly believe that the Palestinian people and the Israeli people can live and coexist side by side in peace and security, thereby fulfilling the numerous relevant decisions and resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): Let me begin by commending the United Arab Emirates for all the efforts it has put into resolution 2720 (2023) to enable the Security Council to obtain an outcome that we hope will scale up the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

While we believe it is time for the hostilities to end and for dialogue and diplomacy to be given a chance, Ghana voted in favour of resolution 2720 (2023) because with so many lives lost — mostly of women and children — and with many more on the verge of starvation, famine and pestilence, it is imperative that we take every opportunity that can help to save lives, facilitate humanitarian access and delivery to the millions of civilians in Gaza and address the deteriorating humanitarian conditions on the ground.

As the resolution we have adopted rightly emphasizes, all parties to the conflict have an obligation to comply with international law, in particular as it impacts the protection of civilians and their well-being. The need to fully respect United Nations premises, personnel and assets also cannot be overemphasized.

We welcome the decision to open the Kerem Shalom border crossing to enhance the delivery of humanitarian assistance and call for the easing of all rigid procedures to speed up the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We also reiterate the call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

As these will be Ghana's final remarks on this subject during our present membership of the Security Council, we urge the Council not to lose sight of its historical responsibility for the implementation of the two-State solution, even in this the darkest of moments. We believe, as we have often stated, that the two-State solution, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, is the key to the resolution of the instability in the Middle East. In that regard, the renewal of the political horizon should be a commitment from which the Council should not waver.

Finally, we express the hope that the implementation of the resolution just adopted will be done in good faith to save human lives in both the Gaza Strip and Israel, and we view the appointment by the Secretary-General of a representative in that regard as important. May the coming year open new paths of opportunity to resolve this decades-long conflict.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Earlier when I introduced our oral amendment, I said that the vote on it would be a moment of truth, and so it was. The United States once again showed its true colours in front of the entire world, blocking an extremely weak call on the part of the Council for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza. Instead, Washington is playing an already extremely underhanded game, essentially forcing into the text license for Israel to kill Palestinian civilians in Gaza, under the pretext of creating the conditions for a cessation of hostilities.

Today at a briefing, the White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications, John Kirby, said that Israeli authorities understand the need to reduce the intensity of the fighting in the Gaza Strip and that it is up to them to take the decision about the timeline of when that will take place.

This is a tragic moment for the Council — not a moment of triumph for multilateral diplomacy, but rather one of gross, unprincipled blackmail and open scorn on the part of Washington for the suffering of Palestinians and the hopes of the global community to put an end to it. Today the Permanent Representative of the United States of America spoke about Washington's direct high-level bilateral diplomacy. We have heard that argument in the past and we can see where it has led. The Security Council is essentially being asked not to get in the way as the United States twists arms in the region, not for the sake of peace, as my American colleague asserts, but for the sake of ensuring Washington's narrow self-interests.

If the document had not been supported by a number of Arab states, we would of course have vetoed it. At the same time, we note that some sponsors, including Arab States, withdrew their co-sponsorship. However, we are always of the view that the Arab world is able to take decisions and bear full responsibility for them. That is the only reason we did not block the document. However, I want to again underscore that we categorically do not agree with the content of the current paragraph 2 and believe that responsibility for all possible consequences lies with the States that gave their consent to its wording, which was forced through by the United States. We will not put our names to it.

Regardless of the outcomes of today's voting, a clear demand by the Security Council for a full-fledged ceasefire remains the imperative. Without it, as the experience of resolution 2712 (2023) has already shown, implementing Security Council resolutions in Gaza is simply impossible. On 8 December during his statement to the Council (see S/PV.9498), Secretary-General António Guterres unambiguously stated that, and the same conclusion emerges from his letter to the Council about options for monitoring resolution 2712 (2023). We are of the view that, whatever its resistance and however much the United States might protect its ally in the region, the Council will return to the issue and precisely and unambiguously demand a cessation of hostilities.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): For the record, I would like to state that the draft resolution that was put into blue on Friday received 83 sponsors from the membership, but that today's resolution 2720 (2023) was not open for co-sponsorship, due to the last minute nature of the negotiations and due to the fact that it was put into blue only this morning, so no one



withdrew their co-sponsorship. It had not been open for co-sponsorship, but I am sure that it would have received widespread support if it had been.

I would like to reflect on the voting that just took place and what it says about this conflict and this body. We welcome its adoption and are grateful for the Council's support. We believe that the resolution begins to unblock life-saving aid, whose denial has condemned more than half a million people in Gaza to famine. The text compels the international community to finally share in the burden that Egypt has been shouldering, and it commits all of us to breaking the cruel blockade strangling Gaza for the past 16 years. But the Palestinian struggle is singular in how every instance of progress serves as a reminder of the scale of the tragedy.

It is not lost on us that, while today we start building a humanitarian architecture that responds to an intolerable situation, we are still unable to stop the war. It is not lost on us that, despite the incalculable damage visited upon them with impunity, Palestinians are asked to accept that diplomacy is the art of what is possible. It is not lost on us that, although what has been possible has been brutally inadequate, they have kept faith in the international system. But what is possible is not predetermined; it is the product of active choices.

The collective choices of the Council, influenced by its structure, have shaped this grim reality. They can help shape a different future. Doing that must begin by understanding that 30 years after they recognized the State of Israel, there is very little left for Palestinians to concede. The injustice of the occupation persists with the international community's complicity. If you have a moral, national or political interest in saving the two-State solution, you must act now.

This resolution gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that, at the very least, the world will not tolerate the continued deprivation of the people of Gaza from basic necessities. It puts in place a system that is necessary now and that will remain necessary when the war ends. We are all responsible for making sure that it works.

We thank each and every Council member for their dedication and support to the process, including the 10 elected members of the Security Council for their steadfast unity on this file. I would like to thank the United States again, and the United Kingdom, for their important constructive diplomatic work behind

the scenes on this issue. I would also like to thank the Ecuadorian presidency for its patience and wisdom in enabling this adoption despite very challenging negotiations. To the United States, I would like to thank Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, whose personal dedication and commitment to help save lives made today possible.

This outcome will enable life-saving humanitarian assistance to get into Gaza and reach those in need. It will quite literally make the difference between life and death for hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians. It is vital that the Council live up to its responsibility by ensuring its full implementation. But as we help save lives here in Gaza so too must we focus here on restoring the hope of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Today's resolution is an important step on the long journey ahead. Any lasting and comprehensive solution demands an end to the war in Gaza, addressing the dramatic situation of those internally displaced, uniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single legitimate and representative Palestinian Authority, reconstructing what has been destroyed and ensuring that never again shall violence, incitement and terror be allowed to thrive.

None of this will be sustainable if there is no equality between Israelis and Palestinians in charting their shared destiny together. It can never be a just peace if equality and dignity are not the basis of it. This resolution gives us a signal of that political horizon ahead. The two-State solution with an independent and sovereign Palestinian State is the only path to achieving just peace that guarantees security, stability and prosperity for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples alike, who both have a right to statehood on their ancestral land. The United Arab Emirates will never tire in its pursuit of that goal.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ecuador.

Ecuador voted in favour of resolution 2720 (2023), which we just adopted and was the result of a laborious negotiation process, the success of which demonstrates the good faith and constructive spirit that we are capable of achieving. We appreciate the willingness shown by all members, and we hope that such a dynamic can be recreated to address other issues.



The humanitarian situation in Gaza is desperate and heartbreaking. Several of us were able to see it first-hand during last week's visit, and providing relief is — and must be — a priority. The aid reaching the Strip is insufficient to meet the needs of the civilian population. The text of the resolution we adopted is aimed at significantly increasing the amount of aid and calls for taking the necessary steps to make that happen. In that regard, the resolution calls for increasing the number of entry routes and establishing mechanisms to optimize the inspection process. For Ecuador, it is of the utmost importance that humanitarian aid be sufficient and continuous and, at the same time, that it be subject to adequate inspections to ensure that such aid is secure and reliable. The resolution in no way contradicts the provisions of the previous resolution 2712 (2023), which we adopted last month, and must constitute a further step towards a humanitarian ceasefire, which we believe to be inevitable and urgent.

In the text of the resolution, the Council condemns the violations of international humanitarian law, violence against civilians and acts of terrorism. It also demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. It cannot be otherwise. Ecuador reaffirms its full condemnation of the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas since 7 October and believes that the text could have clearly mentioned the fact that the hostages are in the hands of Hamas and other groups. But Ecuador is well aware that the perfect is the enemy of the good and that the top priority is the humanitarian situation. Likewise, at times such as these, it is imperative that the text reaffirms the commitment of the Security Council to the two-State solution. Ecuador is convinced that that is the only path to peace and security in the region. We hope that the resolution can be implemented with the urgency that the situation requires and that it will effectively help alleviate the humanitarian situation.

I would like to commend the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, which ends its term on Council this month and led the negotiations on this important resolution, which we were pleased to see adopted during our presidency. Ecuador has made efforts to preside over the Council constructively and responsibly, during which time its highest-level authorities, President Noboa Azín and Foreign Minister Sommerfeld, presided over the Council and sought to build bridges making outcomes such as today's possible.

In conclusion, let me thank all the outgoing members — Albania, Brazil, the United Arab Emirates,

Gabon and Ghana — for their contributions and tireless work over the past two years in the Security Council.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour (Palestine):** The Security Council first met (see S/PV.9439) to address this grave crisis when hundreds of Palestinians had been killed by Israel, the occupying Power, in its siege of, and aggression against, the Gaza Strip. The Council is now meeting after more than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed — almost half of them children — 60,000 people have been wounded and 2 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced. It is meeting as homes, shelters, schools and hospitals have been destroyed and as hunger and disease are spreading like wildfire. No one should forget that what we are talking about are the 2.3 million Palestinians who have been fighting for their lives and facing death every single day for 75 days. They have been fighting for their lives and very existence for more than 75 days.

The Group of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with the support of the overwhelming number of United Nations States Members, have been mobilizing to achieve three objectives, which we have said from the beginning: an immediate end to the carnage and an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian assistance at scale and no forced displacement. We meet today as part of this continuous effort to advance the three goals.

Allow me at the outset to pay tribute to all the humanitarian and health-care workers who, at their own peril, are risking their lives and struggling every single day to address and alleviate an occupation-made humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale. They are operating under conditions where no place and no one is safe, under widespread and indiscriminate bombing, where hospitals, shelters and ambulances are shelled, and with minimal to no access to humanitarian supplies necessary to sustain and save lives. We pay tribute to the Palestine Red Crescent, members of which many Council members met during their visit to the Rafah crossing; to Palestinian medical and civilian rescue teams; to the personnel of the United Nations and its agencies, notably the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; to the members of Palestinian and international humanitarian organizations on the ground; and to the International

Committee of the Red Cross. Their work is heroic and deserves our utmost recognition and respect. Resolution 2720 (2023), submitted by the United Arab Emirates, is intended to allow them to conduct their sacred mission to assist civilians in need and save human lives as Israel, the occupying Power, continues to ignore the global demands for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and deprive the Palestinian people of the humanitarian aid they desperately need.

There are thousands of trucks of humanitarian aid on the Egyptian side, and Egypt is fully willing and poised to see that aid delivered. On their visit, Council members saw those thousands of truckloads lined up from the Al-Arish airport to the Rafah crossing. There are more than 2 million Palestinians in desperate need of such aid on the Palestinian side. This inhumane and criminal Israeli siege and the use of humanitarian aid necessary for the survival of the population as a method of warfare have to end and must end now.

On 4 November, the Deputy Head of the Israeli Civil Administration stated from inside Gaza:

“Whoever returns here, if they return here after, will find scorched earth. No houses. No agriculture. No nothing. They have no future”.

This is just one statement among far too many demonstrating in shocking terms that what we are dealing with is an attempt at the destruction of our people and their displacement forever from their land. This is Israel’s goal, its true objective: no future for Palestinians in Palestine. That is why it is bombing everyone and everything. That is why it targets homes, hospitals, schools, bakeries, agricultural fields and water and sanitation networks, so that the sustenance of life becomes impossible — and it has become impossible. That is why it targets the landmarks of Gaza, which bear witness to its ancient history and to our roots in the land — our historic churches and mosques, our monuments and our architecture.

Israel also targets the storytellers, those who capture our people’s lives, suffering and death, including the journalists conveying to the world the truth about the massacres, about this grave and unbearable injustice being endured by Palestinian people and their families. But Israel’s targets are not only the past and the present of our people, but indeed also the future. That is why it kills our doctors, engineers, poets, academics and artists. That is why it is destroying our cities and towns, our universities and cultural institutions. That is why

it kills our children and terrorizes and traumatizes them, scarring and disfiguring their futures. We often quote the number of children killed — an unbearable tragedy — but we should not forget that 25,000 children have been orphaned and tens of thousands wounded or had limbs amputated.

A 12-year-old Palestinian girl with the most beautiful of names, Dunya — which, in Arabic, means the whole world — lost both her parents, her sister and her brother, who were all killed in the Israeli shelling of her house. She also lost her leg, and I believe that she was interviewed by the CNN journalist the United Arab Emirates managed to let enter the Gaza Strip so she could make her important report. Dunya said that, while she will never forget her loved ones, she must continue living and that she would become a doctor to help children as doctors helped her. But Dunya did not live to become a doctor or to memorialize her family. She was killed a few days later in the strike on the maternity ward of Al-Nasr Hospital. Israel wants to convince us that we need to choose between life and our country by making life in our country impossible. Our people want to live in their country. They want their children to grow up safely in their country. There is no simpler dream, there is no aspiration more sacred than that.

Israel’s treatment of Palestinian civilians and its abhorrent crimes against them were even more starkly revealed after Israel killed three people raising a white flag and representing no danger. It later discovered that they were three Israelis who had been held captive in Gaza. It could have saved them, had it observed the laws of war, but it thought they were Palestinians and shot them in yet another display of total, abject disregard for Palestinian lives. That confirms the many reports of summary executions of Palestinians, murdered in cold blood by Israeli soldiers in Gaza. Israel has also continued its ill treatment and mass arrest and humiliation of Palestinians in despicable scenes filmed by its own soldiers, boasting about their depravity. They are the soldiers of a rogue army, which is unhinged and empowered by the impunity it enjoys. Certain that it will not be held accountable, it is an army that commits atrocities every single day. In the words of Israel’s closest allies, its indiscriminate bombing and its killing rage must stop. That means its crimes must stop. Gaza is like a patient whose wounds you are trying to treat while the killer keeps shooting at them — the killer must be stopped, or the patient will never be saved.

Death is everywhere in Gaza in its different manifestations — destruction, deprivation and disease. People are starving, they have no water, no food and no medicine — or barely any. The resolution that the Council adopted today is intended to help to address this inhumane situation, to alleviate the untold suffering and pain being borne by millions of civilians. We welcome the decision to establish a United Nations mechanism to accelerate the provision of humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza and call for its rapid implementation. The Council also called for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered and expanded humanitarian access. The Secretary-General and all United Nations agencies, as well as humanitarian organizations, have all said that this requires an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which is now backed by 153 States around the world. It took the Council 75 days to finally utter the words “cessation of hostilities”, 40 days after the General Assembly first referred to that objective and tens of thousands of killed Palestinians later. We support the Russian amendment, and the United Arab Emirates, as the Arab representative, reflected that support in its vote. Of course, that paragraph was endorsed in the original blue text by the 83 co-sponsors.

The resolution is also clear about the unwavering commitment to the two-State solution, consistent with international law and United Nations resolutions, and in that context, it is also clear on the status of the Gaza Strip as an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967 and as part of the Palestinian State, the unity of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the role of the Palestinian Authority and the complete rejection of forced displacement in violation of international law.

Let us act now to save lives and to provide life-saving assistance and life-sustaining hope. This resolution is a step in the right direction. It must be implemented and accompanied by massive pressure for an immediate ceasefire — I repeat, an immediate ceasefire. There is no way to stop the war crimes, the crimes against humanity and the genocide under way, other than an immediate ceasefire. I repeat, a ceasefire. There is no way to start addressing the occupation-made humanitarian catastrophe, other than an immediate ceasefire. I repeat, a ceasefire. There is no way to release those held captive other than through an immediate ceasefire. This resolution calls for protection of civilians, deplores attacks against civilians, rejects forced displacement, calls

for immediate and safe humanitarian access and for humanitarian aid to reach the Palestinian population. All that requires an immediate ceasefire, as requested and as called for by the Secretary-General in his famous letter to the Security Council (S/2023/962). Humanity must prevail. International law must prevail. Millions of lives hang in the balance.

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

**Mr. Miller** (Israel): Just a week ago, Jaish Al-Adl carried out a terror attack in Iran in which 11 Iranian police officers were killed. Within one day, the Security Council released a press statement (SC/15534) condemning the act of terror. It took the Security Council one day to express its condolences and sympathy with the families of the victims. It is true — terrorism must be condemned, even if the attacks are perpetrated against police officers of a rogue regime and the world’s leading sponsor of global terror.

Seventy-seven days ago, Hamas intentionally murdered, raped and mutilated 1,300 Israelis and took 250 hostages, and the Council still has yet to issue a single statement condemning Hamas and their atrocities. In addition to the Council’s inability to condemn Hamas’s attack, 130 hostages — women, children and the elderly — are still being held in Gaza, and they must not be allowed to become a footnote. Humanitarian aid is pouring into Gaza every single day, yet the hostages being held by Hamas are not even allowed visits by the Red Cross. That is the most heinous war crime imaginable. The hostages must be at the top of the Council’s agenda.

There is no doubt that humanitarian aid is crucially important, and Israel is already facilitating hundreds of truckloads of aid into Gaza every day. Israel is also willing and able to exponentially increase the entry of aid trucks into Gaza. Israel has already opened the Kerem Shalom crossing in order to ensure the entry of more trucks and has also facilitated the entry of dozens of trucks that arrived from Jordan. The only roadblock for aid entry is the United Nations ability to accept it. Enhancing United Nations monitoring or coordination of aid is not a cure-all, and any enhancement of United Nations aid monitoring cannot be done at the expense of Israel’s security inspections. Israel has not only a right but an obligation to guarantee its security. That is why our mission to eliminate Hamas’s capabilities has not changed. And that is why security inspections of aid

will not change. Israel will not permit the regrouping and rearming of Hamas, as the atrocities of 7 October can never be allowed to repeat themselves.

Israel recently exposed another huge Hamas terror tunnel that stretches four kilometres and was constructed 50 metres underground. That terror tunnel is wide enough for vehicles to drive through. It can house hundreds of terrorists. The amount of cement and equipment needed to build that tunnel alone was immense. That is just one part of Hamas's subterranean city of terror, including missile- and rocket-manufacturing facilities and terrorist-training complexes across Gaza.

It cannot be claimed that Israel did not give any warning. For years, we have sent letters outlining Hamas's terror threat and growing capabilities. We have held countless meetings with officials. We have done everything possible to make it clear that action must be taken. But our words fell on deaf ears.

If the Council seeks to end hostilities, it should start by supporting Israel's mission of returning the hostages and eliminating the Hamas threat, and at the very least, it must prevent Hamas's empowerment. Just as the Council is committed to increasing aid, it should also be committed to blocking the smuggling of arms and the transfer of weapons to the Hamas terrorists. And just as the Council is committed to ensuring that aid reaches Gazan civilians, it should also be committed to ensuring that the aid is not diverted to Hamas terrorists, who do not care about the civilian population. The focus of any resolution should also hold Hamas accountable, while taking every step to prevent them from entrenching themselves and regaining power.

Hamas is a genocidal terror organization. Hamas is a direct threat to the security of Israel, to Gazans and to regional stability. In order to promote security, the Council should first recognize Hamas's terror regime and then focus on the elimination of its threats. It should be focused on freeing the hostages. It should be focused on preventing Hamas from exploiting aid. It should be focused on ensuring that Hamas can no longer expand their terror infrastructure. Any resolution adopted by the Council should be focused primarily on those points. That is the Council's responsibility, and that is key to security.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of Egypt, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the Security Council's success today in adopting the important and influential resolution 2720 (2023), which will facilitate humanitarian access and increase the aid provided to the Gaza Strip. That will also be achieved through the appointment by the Secretary-General of a coordinator for humanitarian affairs and reconstruction to undertake the tasks of facilitating and coordinating aid and establishing an international humanitarian mechanism to work inside the Gaza Strip under the banner and supervision of the United Nations, with the aim of addressing the horrific humanitarian catastrophe to which the residents of the Gaza Strip have been exposed for the third month in a row as a result of the devastating war that Israel is waging against the defenceless Palestinian people. Let me also extend my thanks to the United Arab Emirates and its Permanent Mission to the United Nations for the sincere and tireless efforts it has made and its extensive consultations with members of the Security Council and international organizations in order to adopt that resolution and to make every effort to make it successful. We appreciate and thank the United Arab Emirates for its efforts.

The resolution that was adopted today builds on the previous comprehensive draft resolution submitted by the Group of Arab States and the Islamic Group and sponsored by 81 countries in implementation of the decisions of the extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit held in Riyadh on 11 November, regarding lifting the humanitarian siege imposed on our Palestinian brothers in Gaza. The adoption of today's resolution is a step on the right path towards addressing the bloody humanitarian repercussions of the war on Gaza and ensuring the continuity and sustainability of aid access to the Strip, without hindrance, through a mechanism supervised by the United Nations, so that humanitarian work does not remain hostage to the will of the occupying Power, which cannot, logically or legally, be considered a neutral party when it comes to the provision of humanitarian support.

We hope that this resolution will contribute to supporting the efforts of the international community to provide aid to the Gaza Strip, which, despite Egypt's tireless efforts to provide the maximum support possible to our Palestinian brothers, including food and medicine, is still experiencing a horrific humanitarian catastrophe unprecedented since the Second World War,



in the light of more than 20,000 martyrs, of whom more than 70 per cent are women and children, and more than 53,000 persons wounded. In addition to the severe shortage of food and medicine, Gaza is suffering from a starvation siege and the comprehensive destruction of basic infrastructure, homes, hospitals and medical centres. That catastrophic situation is accompanied by the escalation of incursions carried out by the Israeli army into cities of the West Bank, killing and injuring people, in addition to the continuing attacks by settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which we fear could lead to a spillover throughout the Palestinian territories.

Egypt expresses its thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General. We thank him again for his efforts over the past period and for his continuous calls for a humanitarian ceasefire. We thank him for calling the attention of the Security Council to the threat to international peace and security posed by the situation in Palestine. We thank him for the letter he addressed to the Security Council invoking Article 99 of the Charter (S/2023/962). We also express our appreciation to Mr. Philippe Lazarini, Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We pay tribute to all the heroic UNRWA staff, first for the sacrifices made by UNRWA and its tireless efforts in the hardest conditions in Gaza, as well as for the Commissioner General, who addressed the General Assembly to highlight the collapse of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. That bolstered our endeavours to submit resolution 2720 (2023), adopted today.

Now that the Security Council has assumed its responsibilities and adopted that resolution, we look forward to the bodies and agencies of the United Nations implementing it immediately. That must be done by making concerted efforts that will translate the resolution into a functioning and effective mechanism on the ground, in coordination with the international community, which we call upon to mobilize human and financial resources. That will lead to implementing the objectives of that resolution, namely, achieving sustainable humanitarian access without obstacles in the Gaza Strip. That step should be followed by other steps.

The first must be to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease fire and halt all hostilities without any condition in all parts of Gaza. Every effort that aims to alleviate the humanitarian crisis

and support the humanitarian situation will bear fruit only when the Security Council implements a binding resolution on a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities throughout Gaza without any conditions, end the killing of civilians, allow for humanitarian work and provide protection and security to humanitarian workers. The demand for a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire is a response to the will of the entire international community, as reflected in the resolution adopted by the General Assembly during its tenth emergency special session on 12 December, (General Assembly resolution ES-10/22), which calls for a humanitarian ceasefire. The resolution garnered 153 votes in favour, which reflects a global stance that cannot be disputed. No one can argue that the resolution is not binding, politically or legally.

We stress that the resolution adopted today is not confined to humanitarian aspects alone. It focuses on other items that should be implemented. It stresses that obligations under international law and international humanitarian law must be respected. Civilians and humanitarian workers must be protected. Relief trucks, shelters and civilian facilities must also be protected, along with items indispensable for life. Forced displacement of Palestinians from their territory and homeland must be rejected. It is important to implement the two-State solution in line with United Nations resolutions. It is also important to safeguard the unity of the Palestinian territories in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, under a national Palestinian Authority. All those issues are no less important than the humanitarian aspect. In that connection, Egypt reiterates the extreme importance of creating a political prospect and resuming the negotiation process conducive to the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people in establishing their independent State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only path to ensure the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace in the region and to ensure security and stability for all the peoples of the region.

The success achieved today gives hope, even if slim hope, that must be adhered to and build upon to end the horrible humanitarian tragedy that we are witnessing today in the Gaza Strip. We call upon the Council to make concerted efforts to end that tragedy, which the unarmed Palestinian people have been facing for three months.



We hope that the Council will provide protection for civilians, save innocent people and stop the bloodshed. Those are the most noble objectives of the Security Council and of the United Nations at large.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of December, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Ecuador to the members of the Council and to the Secretariat for the support they have given us. It has been a busy month and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support

and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, including the technical support team, conference service officers, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security staff. As our presidency draws to a close, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of France good luck in the month of January.

On behalf of the Council, I would also like to express our sincere thanks to the five outgoing members: Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates. I commend them for their hard work and contributions during their terms on the Security Council.

*The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.*