



Security Council

Distr.: General
22 May 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 22 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith copies of the briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference convened on 20 May 2020 regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov**

I brief the Security Council today three days after a new coalition Government was sworn into office in Israel following a year of political uncertainty. I look forward to working with the new ministers on the challenges that lie ahead.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is not behind us. Managing its socioeconomic impact affects both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, and it will remain a serious challenge. Beyond the health aspects of the crisis, we need to ensure that cooperation among all sides continues in the interest of peace. To this end, the United Nations will work with the leaders of Israel and Palestine, as well as with our regional and international partners, to create the conditions for returning to meaningful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Our unfaltering commitment to achieving a negotiated two-State solution remains resolute. The Secretary-General has warned on many occasions of the danger of unilateral action. The continuing threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank would constitute a most serious violation of international law, deal a devastating blow to the two-State solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and our broader efforts aimed at maintaining international peace and security.

Recent polls show that the Israeli public is divided on the issue. However, countries of the region and many in the international community have clearly stated their positions regarding annexation.

The Palestinian leadership announced yesterday evening that it sees itself absolved

“as of today, of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli Governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones”

and calls on Israel to assume its obligations as the occupying Power. This statement by President Mahmoud Abbas further calls for negotiations under international auspices, including by the Quartet, to advance a negotiated two-State solution. Tomorrow, I will be meeting with the Palestinian Prime Minister in order to better understand the practical side of the decision by the leadership and its implications on the ground.

If there is one concern we all share, it is that everyone needs to work together to prevent escalation and radicalization. However, if I may speak openly and very frankly on the issue, whatever our individual assessments of the Palestinian reaction to the Israeli threat of annexation may be, that reaction is certainly one thing — it is a desperate cry for help. It is a call for immediate action and a cry for help from a generation of leadership that has invested its life over a quarter of a century in building institutions and preparing for statehood.

The Palestinian leadership is not making threats. It is calling for urgent action to preserve the prospects for peace, and it is doing so at a time where a new, younger generation, with its own aspirations for the future, is stepping forward. Many of these young people feel betrayed and increasingly cynical. This new generation, born in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, is disillusioned from a quarter of a century of efforts that have not led to statehood. We do not know what future they will carve out for themselves, but whatever future young Palestinians and Israelis do decide to build, we have an obligation to prevent violence and protect the chances for peace.

I therefore ask the Security Council today to join the Secretary-General in his call in opposition to unilateral steps that will hinder current diplomatic efforts to create the conditions for bringing Israelis and Palestinians back to the table. We owe this to all the young Palestinians and Israelis out there. I also call on my colleagues in the Middle East Quartet — the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union — to work with the United Nations and quickly come forward with a proposal that will enable the Quartet to take up its mediation role and work jointly with countries of the region to advance the prospects for peace. Israel must abandon its annexation threats, and the Palestinian leadership must re-engage with all members of the Quartet. Everyone must do their part.

Returning to the situation on the ground, let me note that it continues to be dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite growing political tensions, Palestinian and Israeli authorities have continued their notable coordination around efforts to limit the spread of the virus and are taking careful steps to reopen their economies and lift virus-related restrictions.

Relatively successful prevention efforts in the occupied Palestinian territory have thus far ensured that the limited capacity of the health system has not been overwhelmed. However, there remain considerable concerns regarding the ability of the Palestinian health sector to cope with a potential surge in cases, especially in Gaza. In particular, there are continuing shortages of critical supplies, including testing materials, personal protective equipment, ventilators and essential intensive care unit equipment, owing to funding gaps and a shortage in global supply.

The United Nations and its partners have continued to work to address these gaps and their ramifications. Thus far, over 50 per cent of the amount requested in the COVID-19 inter-agency response plan — some \$23 million — has been raised. Including resources outside the response plan, some \$39.5 million have been mobilized to support COVID-19-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Pursuant to an agreement between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities, over 10,000 Palestinian labourers crossed into Israel from the West Bank on 3 May. They are part of an estimated 40,000 who were granted permits to stay in Israel until the end of Ramadan. On 4 May, Israel approved new regulations obligating employers in Israel to provide medical insurance and appropriate accommodation for Palestinian workers.

In Gaza, the health system continues to face immense challenges despite the low number of positive COVID-19 cases. As of the end of April, 44 per cent of essential medicines and 30 per cent of essential medical supplies in the Strip had less than a month's stock remaining.

The Rafah crossing with Egypt opened in one direction for three days between 12 and 14 May to allow for the return of 1,168 people to Gaza. Travel through the Erez crossing has been limited largely to urgent medical cases and those persons' companions, as well as to staff of international organizations and returning Gaza residents. Approximately 460 people have been allowed to return to Gaza and some 225 others to exit through that crossing.

As elsewhere around the world, the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on Palestinians have been immense. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have lost their jobs, small and medium enterprises are unable to operate, children cannot attend school in person and violence against women and children has increased. As always, the most vulnerable are at the greatest risk of suffering. Recent gains in Gaza relating to water, sanitation, electricity and livelihoods are at extreme risk of being fully reversed. COVID-19 has damaged Gaza's economy across sectors: around 13,000 industrial workers have temporarily lost their jobs and virtually all restaurants and

hotels have ceased operations, leading to the release of over 10,000 workers, while perhaps half of all employees in the information and communications technologies sector have also been laid off.

The Palestinian people are experiencing the same shock and uncertainty as the rest of humankind; however, their Government is unable to respond to the socioeconomic effects with the same agency as an independent sovereign State. It cannot avail itself of the conventional monetary and fiscal tools that sovereign countries ordinarily use in times of economic distress. It cannot influence interest rates, print money, devalue its currency or access international capital markets to finance the deficit spending needed to compensate those who have lost jobs and support businesses to stay afloat. The vulnerable fiscal position of the Palestinian Authority has been further damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its revenues are down sharply owing to restrictions on movement and business operations and to lower demand for goods. Given the additional spending required to respond to and recover from the pandemic, estimates are that the Palestinian Authority's fiscal deficit could exceed \$2 billion this year.

Israel has announced a soft loan of \$233 million for a period of four months against future Palestinian clearance revenues. It will provide a critical fiscal lifeline for the Palestinian Authority. However, unless combined with a long-term response and reform strategy, including a resolution of the outstanding fiscal issues, that lifeline only postpones difficult fiscal decisions. Working with its international partners, the Palestinian Authority must also adopt emergency budget measures to address the pandemic along the lines recently laid out by the World Bank.

An additional complicating factor, as of 9 May, is an amendment to an Israeli military order that purportedly holds Palestinian commercial banks liable for processing payments from the Palestinian Authority to Palestinian security prisoners, their families or the families of those killed in attacks. This development injects more uncertainty into the already vulnerable Palestinian financial system. On 24 April, the Jerusalem District Court issued a decision ordering the temporary confiscation of some \$128 million from the Palestinian Authority as compensation to families of victims of attacks against Israelis during the second intifada. The Court ruled that the sum would, at least in part, be collected from Palestinian Authority clearance revenues withheld since March 2019 under Israeli legislation concerning payments by the Palestinian Authority to security prisoners or families of Palestinians killed in attacks.

Clashes between the Israeli security forces and Palestinians continued during the reporting period. Overall, in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, two Palestinians, including a teenager, and an Israeli soldier were killed. Sixty-five Palestinians, including six children, and two Israelis, one child and one soldier, were injured in various incidents. On 28 April, a Palestinian man stabbed a 62-year-old Israeli woman in the Israeli city of Kfar Saba, moderately wounding her; he was arrested. On 12 May, an Israeli soldier was killed by a stone thrown at his head during an arrest operation by Israeli security forces in the village of Ya'bed near Jenin. Later that day, a Palestinian man was shot and wounded by Israeli security forces at the Kalandia checkpoint after reportedly attempting a stabbing attack against those forces. On the following day, a Palestinian teenager was shot dead by Israeli security forces during clashes in the Fawwar refugee camp, near Hebron, during an arrest operation. On 14 May, a 19-year-old Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli security forces after carrying out a suspected ramming attack near Hebron; an Israeli soldier was wounded in the incident.

In Gaza, the calm that has prevailed in recent months continued. On 6 May, a rocket was fired from Gaza towards Israel. In response, Israeli forces targeted

Hamas facilities in the Strip. No injuries were reported in either incident. On several occasions, Israeli forces opened fire, injuring four Palestinians.

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, concerns remain over the situation of Palestinian children in Israeli custody. On 11 May, Jamie McGoldrick, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a joint statement calling on Israeli and Palestinian authorities to immediately release children in detention and emphasizing that the best way to uphold the rights of detained children amid a dangerous pandemic in any country is to release them and to put a moratorium on new admissions to detention facilities.

During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 20 incidents in which Israeli settlers injured Palestinians or reportedly damaged their property, with a high concentration of incidents reported in Nablus and Ramallah governorates. In the same period, there were reports of 23 incidents of stone and Molotov cocktail-throwing in which Palestinians injured Israeli civilians in the West Bank or reportedly damaged their property. On 18 May, Israel's District Court in Lod convicted an Israeli man of the horrific murder of three members of the Palestinian Dawabsheh family, including a toddler, who were killed as they slept when their family home in the West Bank village of Duma was burned down in 2015.

As the Secretary-General noted in his policy brief last month,

“[a]cross every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.”

According to recent reporting by UN-Women, Palestinian women and girls are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, which is creating and exacerbating pre-existing gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities and is expected to widen inequalities, especially in the economic sphere. In that context, I remain concerned by the increase in incidents of gender-based violence, especially in situations where families are confined to small living spaces and exposed to increased socioeconomic pressures. Non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza have reported a rise in cases of life-threatening incidents of gender-based violence and have raised concerns about the ongoing lack of protection, shelters and referral services.

In early May, the Israeli Ministry of Defence approved the seizure of municipal planning authority from the Hebron municipality in relation to the Al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs. The move was justified by the goal of making the site accessible to persons with disabilities, while stating that the project would not change prayer arrangements or the status quo. The order was issued on 12 May, allowing 60 days for objections. The Palestinian leadership, the Hebron municipality, the Waqf and Islamic authorities, among others, have condemned the move, with some arguing that it violates the 1997 Hebron Protocol. Any change to the delicate balance at holy sites not agreed by the stakeholders threatens stability and must not be made unilaterally.

Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities demolished 32 Palestinian-owned structures owing to lack of Israeli-issued building permits. Consequently, 16 people, including 10 children, were displaced and another 170 were otherwise affected. Of the structures demolished by Israeli authorities during the reporting period, all 32 were in Area C of the West Bank. While there has been an overall decline in demolitions and displacement, any such steps are contrary to Israel's obligations under international law and must stop.

Turning to the region, in the occupied Golan, the overall security situation remains stable despite continued violations by both parties, including breaches of the ceasefire line and the presence of unauthorized personnel and equipment in the areas of separation and limitation. On 30 April, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed three missiles fired from the Alpha side impacting the Bravo side, a helicopter on the Alpha side firing a missile across the ceasefire line, as well as a rocket exploding in the area of separation. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted a strike on the Bravo side. On 3 May, UNDOF observed one aircraft flying from the Alpha side and crossing the ceasefire line, followed on 4 May by two drones from the Alpha side crossing the ceasefire line and hovering over the area of separation. These developments have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and Syria. The parties have an obligation to respect the terms of the Disengagement Agreement.

In Lebanon, the Government began formal discussions with the International Monetary Fund on 13 May, following the adoption of a national financial recovery plan. Amid an uptick in new COVID-19 cases, the Government reimposed a total lockdown on 13 May for four days, with the exception of essential services, to allow for enhanced contact tracing and testing and to inform the next steps for containment.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations, including along the Blue Line, remained mostly stable. UNIFIL convened a tripartite meeting with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces under COVID-19 restrictions on 14 May to urge the parties to avoid provocative actions and fully utilize UNIFIL's liaison and coordination arrangements to preserve the cessation of hostilities.

In conclusion, let me return to my initial words. I firmly believe that the time has come for all sides to do their part in the coming weeks and months in order to preserve the prospect of a negotiated two-State resolution to the conflict in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. Those efforts must begin immediately; there is no time to lose. The fate of the Palestinian and Israeli people must not be determined by destructive unilateral actions that cement divisions and may put peace beyond our reach in our lifetime.

Annex II

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve

I thank Special Coordinator Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his statement.

On Sunday 17 May, the new Israeli Government was sworn in, bringing an end to months of political uncertainty. We look forward to working with the new Israeli Government in a constructive and comprehensive way in the spirit of the long-standing friendship that binds us. We hope that this Government will be a partner for the relaunch of the peace process in line with international law and through direct negotiations between the parties.

We remain deeply concerned about certain provisions in the coalition agreement regarding the prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories. If put into practice, these would constitute a clear breach of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Council. Belgium, together with its European partners, will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed upon by the parties through direct negotiations, including with regard to Jerusalem. We will continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

As friends and close partners of Israel, we strongly advise the Israeli Government against taking steps towards annexation. We also call on the international community, especially those States with influence, to spare no effort to prevent any such steps. As stated by European Union High Representative Borrell, “steps towards annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged”. Indeed, annexation would risk entailing significant legal, political, security and other consequences — not only for Israel but also for the wider region. Furthermore, annexation would further undermine any prospect for a just and durable solution and would mean the irreversible end of any prospect of negotiation about any meaningful peace plan. We call on all partners to refrain from unilateral decisions that would undermine or seriously hamper prospects for a return to the negotiation table. We also call on parties to continue implementing all agreements and understandings. In that regard, we note with concern the recent announcement by President Mahmoud Abbas.

The framework for the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been set out in detail in numerous Council resolutions. With a view to ending the conflict, Belgium remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent status issues, including those related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and refugees.

It is important that the international community increase its efforts to help achieve a just and lasting peace. We stand ready to work with all relevant stakeholders to renew international and multilateral efforts aimed at achieving that goal, be it through existing frameworks, such as the Middle East Quartet, or new ones. However, we stress the need for such efforts to be fully in line with international law and the internationally agreed parameters, and to take place on the basis of direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties. Only a solution that is acceptable to both sides will be able to pave the way for sustainable peace, not only for Israel and Palestine, but for the wider region, as a whole.

Annex III**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for the briefing.

During our previous video-teleconference on the situation in the Middle East (see S/2020/341), Mr. Mladenov warned the Council against the dangerous prospect of the annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. He shared his concern with us again today, which is widely echoed by the international community.

We have heard the loud and clear voice of Palestinian people. The League of Arab States, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and many other United Nations Member States have also reasserted their objection in that regard.

China is also deeply concerned about reports of the plan to annex part of the occupied Palestinian territory. Such a plan, if implemented, would seriously violate international law and relevant United Nations resolutions and imperil the two-State solution. The two-State solution is the only viable way forward to resolve the Palestinian question. We urge the relevant parties to stop any unilateral actions and refrain from escalating conflict and tension. It is also our firm position that no country should back such unilateral actions. China shares the view that the Security Council should discharge its mandate and do its part to prevent such dangerous unilateral actions.

The Palestinian question is at the root of the turbulence in the Middle East. The issue is indeed testing human conscience and international justice. Independent statehood is the inalienable national right of the Palestinian people and it is not something to be traded. Concrete efforts must be made to implement resolution 2334 (2016), including ceasing all settlement activities, stopping the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and preventing violence against civilians. More efforts are also needed to advance the political process and pave the way for the early resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the land for peace principle and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we encourage Israel and Palestine to strengthen public health cooperation, and Israel to lift the blockade against Gaza. We commend United Nations agencies, including the World Health Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for helping Palestine address the pandemic. The international community should scale up assistance to the Palestine people, including through increased financial support to UNRWA. China stands with the Palestinian people in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We have provided personal protective equipment and test reagents to Palestine and have held several videoconferences to share know-how and experience.

The Palestinian people can also count on China's continued support of their just cause to restore legitimate national rights. We fully support Palestine in building an independent and sovereign State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will work closely with the international community in the pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Annex IV

Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger

I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

The Dominican Republic reiterates its deep concern, already expressed several times, regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict and its enormous consequences for the civilian population and for the stability of the whole Middle East region.

And now, with the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the well-being of many people with long-standing vulnerabilities is threatened even more. With cases already confirmed, we may, sooner rather than later, be dealing with the consequences of years of neglect and inaction that have made this one of the most serious protracted humanitarian situations in the world and have already caused the loss of many generations. Therefore, urgent concerted action among States and humanitarian organizations is needed to address the needs of the affected population in a dignified and sustained way.

The conflict that persists in the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as the further deterioration of the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation there, exacerbates the level of uncertainty about the future of the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the root of that conflict remains the unresolved issue of the right of the Palestinian people to their national independence and sovereignty. The Dominican Republic considers that, at this particular juncture, it is imperative to redouble conciliation efforts between the parties, with the support of the international community, in order to open the door for meaningful and constructive discussion that addresses the challenges they face together.

We must avoid at all cost unilateral actions that could create deeper wounds and further enhance the already deep resentment and mistrust that prevail in this conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic is a common enemy for both Israelis and Palestinians and, as such, the only way they can fight it is through collective and joint action based on solidarity and a common sense of humanity.

Meaningful and fair dialogue around the numerous obstacles that threaten the two-State solution must continue with the realization of the indisputable interdependence of the two countries, the need for collaboration and, on the basis of international consensus, the fact that the only way forward for Palestinians and Israelis is to negotiate a two-State solution in order to live in peace, side by side. Therefore, we encourage all parties to immediately end all actions that undermine support for the two-State solution and ultimately hinder peace.

We are pleased to learn that, following an agreement with the Palestinian Authority, the State of Israel has reopened a number of crossings — in a move that allows thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank seeking employment opportunities to return to work. We encourage that type of coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as it can promote the much-needed dialogue to relaunch negotiations towards a peace plan and, ultimately, alleviate the living conditions of the affected populations. As an international community, we believe that our collective action must be aimed at supporting the parties in an impartial and effective way towards real and sustainable solutions.

To conclude, we reaffirm the need to increase our efforts to continue working tirelessly until we can resume a meaningful and constructive dialogue, based on mutual respect and on the internationally agreed parameters. That will pave the way for a new stage towards building a true peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Women, children and young people on both sides deserve a future of peace, progress and justice. Let us be the ones who helped them achieve their aspirations.

Annex V

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

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

We congratulate Israel on the formation of the new Government. As an immediate priority, we call on the new Government and the Palestinian Authority to continue their coordination regarding the continued threat of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and to guarantee the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

In that context, we recall the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, as well as the joint appeal by the five United Nations special envoys to the Middle East. We welcome the efforts by the United Nations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in supporting the fight against the virus.

Secondly, the initiative taken by the United States has given us the impetus to revive the Middle East peace process. We urge parties to make efforts to resolve the conflict. We call on Israel and Palestine to take steps towards resuming direct and meaningful negotiations, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, leading to a negotiated two-State solution and taking into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties and Israeli security concerns. We hope that the international community, regional actors and the Middle East Quartet will continue efforts towards finding a lasting solution. We encourage the parties to engage in constructive negotiations.

Estonia is concerned that unilateral steps, such as the annexation of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, could undermine the viability of the two-State solution and increase instability in the region. We are worried about the announcement by President Mahmoud Abbas yesterday with regard to terminating agreements with Israel and the United States. We call on the Palestinian Authority to reconsider the decision and to remain committed to its obligations based on those agreements, especially those related to security.

Estonia strongly urges the parties to refrain from acts of violence, terror and incitement. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, as well as any other form of violence targeting the civilian population.

Finally, to engage in direct negotiations, both parties need Governments with legitimate and democratic mandates. We also expect Palestinians to announce elections. We encourage all Palestinian factions to work towards reconciliation, which would enable them to address common challenges, as well as the needs and expectations of the Palestinian population. That is a necessary element in reaching a two-State solution.

Annex VI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas De Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

First, I thank Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Allow me to voice France's growing concerns regarding the threat of annexation. Like the overwhelming majority of the Council, we expressed our worries last month regarding the prospect of annexation of parts of the West Bank after the signing of the Israeli coalition agreement (see S/2020/341). However, the inauguration of the new Israeli Government brings us closer to that prospect.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Israeli authorities in a constructive and comprehensive way, in the spirit of the long-standing friendship that binds us to Israel and of our unshakable commitment to Israel's security. Nevertheless, I want to echo Minister Le Drian's statement and reiterate that any annexation of any part of the West Bank, including only settlements, would represent a violation of international law, which strictly prohibits the acquisition of territory by force. It would jeopardize the two-State solution envisaged in previous negotiations and agreements. It would also undermine the prospect of peace talks, for which the Council unanimously calls.

Annexation is not in the interest of the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Europeans or the international community. The implementation of such a unilateral step would further threaten regional stability. It would also be detrimental to Israel's role in the world, its integration in the regional context and its relationship with its partners.

France therefore again warns the Israeli Government against such a move, which would not be without consequences for its relations with the European Union. We will not recognize any changes to the June 1967 lines unless agreed to by both parties. In that regard, let me recall that resolution 2334 (2016) creates obligations for third parties by calling on Member States to distinguish between the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We recall the importance for all parties to respect existing agreements.

In that context, it is more urgent than ever to restart peace negotiations. France firmly believes that only negotiations aimed at establishing two States living in peace and security along secure, recognized borders on the basis of the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, are likely to lead to a just and lasting peace in the region. That is also the position of the European Union, based on the Council's resolutions.

Together with the European Union, we stand ready to support any effort made on that basis, in line with international law and by means of negotiations between the parties. We are working closely with our European, as well as our Arab, partners on that issue. We therefore stand ready to support any initiative aimed at relaunching credible negotiations. As we have already said, we are ready to consider President Abbas's proposals to the Council in February (see S/PV.8717).

We also believe that Palestinian unity is of paramount importance in the current situation. That can be achieved only through credible reconciliation talks. The Palestinian Authority should set a time frame for the holding of general elections in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem once the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is under control. Those elections could foster Palestinian reconciliation, which is also essential for peace. That responsibility lies in the hands of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, I am glad to hear that the spread of the pandemic is, for now, more or less under control, but efforts should not be stopped as long as the risk remains. Let me once again commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as the other United Nations agencies, for their exemplary role in response to the pandemic. I also welcome the new agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the issue of clearance revenue and call for it to pave the way for a comprehensive agreement.

Nevertheless, more needs to be done in order to promote cooperation and dialogue between the parties apart from combating the pandemic. As the already dire economic situation in Palestine is likely to worsen, France has advanced its annual budgetary contribution to the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, the French Development Agency has provided financial support to the Ministries of Health and National Economy. France also continues to support the UNRWA response to COVID-19. The meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians on 2 June will give us the opportunity to once again renew our commitment to supporting a viable two-State solution.

France, along with its European partners, will continue to promote multilateralism and support for the international rules-based order. The Charter of the United Nations prohibits the acquisition of territory by force. The Council has established the internationally agreed parameters on which the two-State solution is based, in particular the distinction between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in resolutions 242 (1967) to 2334 (2016). The Security Council should not remain silent about any violation of international law.

Today we are at a crossroads for the Middle East peace process. As Council members, it is our responsibility to unite to promote peace, not chaos.

Annex VII

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Juergen Schulz

We congratulate Israel on the formation of a Government, and we look forward to continuing our close cooperation with the new Government. Germany remains steadfast in its strong commitment to Israel's security and its right to exist, as well as to peace in the Middle East. Now is the time to engage the new Government through dialogue.

However, we are seriously concerned about the provisions in the coalition agreement as well as remarks made by members of the new Israeli Government regarding a possible annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank. We firmly believe that unilateral action in that regard would be extremely harmful to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It would have serious, negative repercussions for the viability of the two-State solution and the entire peace process, as well as for regional stability and the rules-based international order itself. It would also negatively affect Israel's standing within the international community at a time when we need closer cooperation.

As a close partner and friend, we therefore strongly encourage the Israeli Government not to implement any measures that would constitute a violation of international law. We will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, unless agreed to by Israel and the Palestinians. We will continue to distinguish between the internationally recognized territory of the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with our obligations under international law.

Germany remains convinced that a negotiated two-State solution based on international law and the internationally agreed parameters is the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets the security needs of both sides, fulfils Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, resolves all permanent-status issues and guarantees equal rights for all inhabitants.

We must find ways to revive the political process and resume direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties in order to resolve the final-status issues and to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The starting point for any discussion or negotiations should be the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and the internationally agreed parameters. The format of such direct and meaningful negotiations must be agreed by both parties. We would support reviving the Middle East Quartet or establishing an alternative multilateral format.

In the absence of such negotiations, the parties to the conflict must refrain from taking any measures that could further deteriorate the situation on the ground and undermine the viability of a negotiated two-State solution, especially where such measures would bring closer a de facto one-State reality with unequal rights for Israelis and Palestinians.

We also note with concern yesterday's announcement by President Abbas with regard to cooperation agreements, including security cooperation with Israel. We call on both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to remain committed to the Oslo agreements and their obligations thereunder.

Resolution 2334 (2016) remains the most crucial guideline and must be fully implemented with regard to settlement activities as well as acts of terror, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. We reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian

territories are illegal under international law and severely undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and for achieving a negotiated two-State solution.

We call upon Israel to end the expansion of settlements, including the latest construction plans for Efrat, Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and the E-1 and E-2 areas, the legalization of settlement outposts and the ongoing demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures and land.

We are also deeply concerned by the latest acts of violence and by the deaths and injuries on both sides. Germany condemns all attacks on Israel in the strongest possible terms, including those against Israeli security forces, and the repeated firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Israel has the right to defend itself and respond appropriately and proportionally to attacks against its territory or citizens. Incidents in which innocent civilians are indiscriminately targeted or subjected to violence must be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators of any crimes must be held accountable.

Finally, we remain concerned about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, while noting the important achievements by both sides in containing the pandemic. We reiterate our call on both parties to enhance their coordination and cooperation in order to further mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak in Israel, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, bearing in mind their respective responsibilities and obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

We commend the United Nations and all its agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for their efforts to respond to the humanitarian implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the occupied Palestinian territories. Considering the increased risks to the health of detainees posed by COVID-19, particularly Palestinian children and other vulnerable persons, we encourage Israel to consider taking appropriate action on humanitarian grounds.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations

I thank the Special Coordinator Mladenov for his important and, as usual, very comprehensive briefing on the situation on the ground.

This month marks the seventy-second anniversary of a catastrophe for the Palestinian people known as the Nakba, when more than 700,000 Palestinians were ousted from their homes and stripped of their lands in Palestine. Since then, there has been only tragedy after tragedy for the Palestinian people. And just yesterday, the President of the State of Palestine announced their withdrawal from a previously made agreement with Israel. That is indeed unfortunate. However, we realize it is to be expected given the oppression and injustice suffered by the Palestinians all these years. Against that backdrop, let me share a number of pertinent points.

First, the catastrophic situation can be brought to an end only by ending the Israeli occupation. We must never forget that Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land is the root cause of this protracted problem. Compounding it is Israel's illegal settlement policy in the occupied territories, which blatantly disregards international law and opinion, including resolution 2334 (2016). Without addressing the root cause, the Palestinian people will never escape their suffering. As Indonesia has repeatedly stressed, the Security Council has the responsibility to put an end to this situation, and to prevent the proposed annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

I therefore come to my second point: it is the solemn duty of the Council to act against that annexation plan. There should be no ambiguity on this matter. Annexation constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Fourth Geneva Convention and various United Nations resolutions. It puts the two-State solution in jeopardy. Israel's insistence on continuing on the path of annexation will destroy any prospect for peace, create regional instability, usher in a new cycle of violence and eventually undermine Israel's security interests.

Rather than stand idly by, the Security Council, in affirmation of its mandate to maintain international peace and security, must address Israel's illegal actions. Moreover, I also urge the international community at large to stop Israel's creeping annexation through various means, including halting any support to businesses related to the illegal settlements. In that regard, let me remind this body that resolution 2334 (2016) calls on all States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967" (*para. 5*). We would therefore be complicit if we allowed Israel to continue its journey to annexation.

Let me now turn to my third point, regarding the coronavirus disease mitigation efforts in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinians face the looming threat of annexation amid the equally formidable threat of the pandemic. With the ongoing demolitions of homes, forced evictions and displacement of families, Palestinians are facing a health, humanitarian and human rights crisis. We join all others in appealing to the international community to strengthen support to United Nations agencies and civil society organizations, which are making a difference on the ground. We also applaud all health and humanitarian personnel, working tirelessly to address this multitude of crises.

We warn that the accelerating "creeping annexation" by Israel of Palestinian lands definitely threatens to destroy the vision of two States. We cannot allow this to happen, as it would generate a perpetual catastrophe affecting the region and beyond.

I would also like to echo what Special Coordinator Mladenov said and the warning of the Secretary-General of the danger of taking unilateral actions that would hinder ongoing diplomatic efforts to create the conditions for bringing Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. It is time to resume credible multilateral negotiations on the Palestinian question, guided by the internationally agreed parameters, and to implement the two-State solution, as called for by President Abbas and echoed by Nickolay just now.

I once again reaffirm Indonesia's unequivocal solidarity with, and support for, the Palestinian people in achieving their inalienable rights, including the establishment of a contiguous independent State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In conclusion, I agree that there has been enough talking; what is needed now is for all Council members to implement the various relevant Council resolutions so as to get all parties to sit back down together again.

Annex IX

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in Palestine. I would like also to welcome with us this morning Minister Riad Mansour, Permanent Representative of the Observer State of Palestine, and Mr. Dany Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations.

Through its many resolutions, the Security Council has expressed its views on all aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The General Assembly has done the same. Through those resolutions, the cardinal principles that should pave the way for dialogue and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians have been clearly defined.

The occupation by force and annexation of Palestinian land is illegal and must end, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016).

The continuation of Israel's colonization policy, which has been established as a system of administration of the Palestinian territories, is likewise illegal.

The disproportionate use of force against often unarmed Palestinian civilians, including women and children, is unacceptable and contrary to international law.

With resolution 1515 (2003), inter alia, the Council, together with the international community, further enshrined the two-State solution — of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967 borders — as the basis for the resolution of this conflict.

What progress have we achieved since then in resolving this crisis? Not very much, I would say. On the contrary, Israel's policy of annexation of Palestinian land makes the two-State solution almost illusory, and the prospect of the annexation of a large part of the settlements in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley does not encourage us to be optimistic.

Faced with this situation, the Niger believes that we must do everything possible to support all initiatives that could enable us to help the countries and the peoples of this tormented region of the world to find benchmarks for reconciliation, peace and peaceful coexistence.

As former South African President Nelson Mandela said, "to make peace with an enemy, you must work with that enemy and that enemy becomes your partner". Perhaps it is this spirit that has led Israel and Palestine to establish cooperation, which we welcome, in the context of the fight against the coronavirus disease pandemic. Indeed, the realization that neither walls nor checkpoints could protect the populations on either side from the virus is a step in the right direction. We hope that the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority will use that cooperation to overcome their differences and return to the negotiating table, in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions.

At this particularly difficult time for all the peoples of the world, we urge the Palestinians and the Israelis to respond favourably to the appeal of the Secretary-General to build a framework for cooperation and to pool their efforts in order to effectively combat the spread of the coronavirus and its disastrous consequences for populations already exposed to various deprivations.

May this blessed month of Ramadan strengthen this nascent dynamic of cooperation between Israel and Palestine, and may it enable the peoples of this region, the cradle of the three great religions, to enjoy peace, security and development.

Annex X**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. We are grateful to Nickolay for all his efforts and support him and his initiatives and ideas.

As never before, international cooperation and action are needed to advance the Middle East peace process. Plans for the annexation of Palestinian territories threaten to undermine this process. President Mahmoud Abbas announced yesterday that the Palestinian Authority is free from its commitments under the Oslo Accords. As a result, the door to any prospects for the two-State solution may be closed. It proves that no time should be wasted. We see no alternative to two States, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully, side by side. In this regard, we reiterate our call to refrain from any unilateral action that may undermine prospects for such a solution.

Russia, as a member of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, is ready to fully engage in efforts to safeguard the principles of the settlement, which are enshrined in the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. They provide a basis for the creation of an independent, sovereign, territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We say no to violence. At the same time, we say no to the annexation of Palestinian territories, but also to that of the Syrian Golan Heights and of Lebanese territories. We say no to continuation of settlement activities, the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property, and violent clashes.

Events show the urgent need to engage in efforts to salvage the peace process. We are ready to support and facilitate them as a member of the Quartet. We are also ready to engage with key countries of the region to consolidate collective efforts and to hold Quartet meetings with their participation. We will continue dialogue with countries in the Middle East and with the League of Arab States.

Palestinian unity is more necessary than ever. We will continue our efforts in this regard, and greatly appreciate the role of our Egyptian friends.

We urge Palestinians and Israelis to continue coordination on fighting the coronavirus disease pandemic. We share concerns about possible consequences of the spread of the disease in the Gaza Strip. But even without the pandemic, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire. We note that medical equipment has been delivered by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). However, given the humanitarian situation in Gaza, these efforts should be enhanced. The work of UNRWA, and support for it from the international community, become more important than ever. We see no alternative to the Agency as an important element for maintaining stability and providing assistance to Palestinian refugees in the region.

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Inga Rhonda King**

I wish to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to follow with concern the developments affecting the State of Palestine and its people. We are deeply concerned about Israel's latest announcement, regarding the annexation of large areas of the West Bank as early as July, and we call for the cessation of the construction of new settlements and of all other illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem.

Annexation constitutes a serious violation of international law and severely undermines the viability of the two-State solution. My delegation remains committed to the international consensus on the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the rest of the occupied Arab territories.

Moreover, we remain concerned with the continued deterioration of all Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 and call on all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). We reaffirm our support for a negotiated two-State solution based on the pre-1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps. Any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must adequately and justly address the needs of both sides.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls for "immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction" (*para. 6*). However, we continue to receive reports of clashes between Israeli forces and civilians across the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, resulting in injuries and loss of human life. We condemn these acts of violence and call on Israel to abide by its obligations and responsibilities under international law.

Amid these worrisome developments, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face chronic financial deficits. We urge the international community to continue providing funding for UNRWA and bilateral programmes in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to improve and preserve access to primary and secondary medical care for refugee and non-refugee populations.

To conclude, we urge Israel, the occupying Power, to reverse the settlement policy in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions for bringing an end to the occupation and achieve the two-State solution.

Annex XII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Xolisa Mabhongo**

Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing today. It is indeed a sobering account of the persistent reality facing millions in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Allow me to make a few remarks on the issue of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the occupied Palestinian territories. South Africa fully supports the call by the Secretary-General as well as the Envoys to the Middle East urging all warring parties in the region to end hostilities and turn their focus to the challenge posed by COVID-19. We should, however, emphasize that in the case of Palestine there are no warring parties in the conventional sense, given the asymmetrical nature of power in the context of an occupation. We support and continue to call for the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid, medical supplies and volunteers providing medical assistance to all parts of the occupied territories.

My delegation commends the Palestinian Authority for the efforts it has undertaken amid difficult circumstances to ensure the health and safety of Palestinians in the occupied territories during these unprecedented times brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and express solidarity with the people of Palestine. We call on Member States as well as the rest of the international community to support the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees.

I would now like to turn to the reality that the Palestinian people currently face. The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations begins with the quote:

“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.”

We must acknowledge that we have failed the people of Palestine. Entire generations of Palestinian children have known nothing but violent oppression and the untold sorrow of being stripped of their lands, identity and human rights. On 15 May, Palestinians observed Nakba Day, when, 72 years ago, the world stood by and watched while hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee or were expelled from their homes, villages and towns. Very few have been able to return and reclaim their heritage. It is perhaps ironic that the history of our Organization, which is meant to bring about global peace and security, runs almost concurrently with that of the period of occupation that began with the Nakba.

The stated purpose of the United Nations is, according to Article I of the Charter,

“To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace”.

In that regard, we have again failed the people of Palestine. To date no action has been taken to stop the building of settlements on illegally occupied land; to stop the confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and property; to stop the illegal blockade of Gaza, essentially forcing 3 million people to live in an open-air prison; or to stop the annexation of territory illegally acquired through the use of force.

All of those actions are violations of international law and a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security, and no collective measures have been

taken towards the prevention or removal of the threats to peace facing the Palestinian people. We, the Security Council, the wider United Nations membership and the international community, cannot allow such flagrant violations of international law to continue. The prevailing situation undermines our credibility.

South Africa reminds members of the Security Council that the fate of the State of Palestine and the two-State solution, which has been endorsed by Member States for decades, is aligned with international law, including General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. These cannot be disregarded or ignored.

We, as members of the Security Council and indeed the United Nations, all subscribe to a collective set of norms and values that should govern our behaviour towards one another. Those principles are described in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, including its paragraph 4, which states:

“All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”

It is the obligation of the United Nations and the Security Council in particular to act against those who go against these norms and values.

It is perplexing that during these unprecedented times, as the international community addresses the global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel is exploiting the situation to further advance its de facto annexation of Palestinian land. The dangerous prospect of Israel continuing with its unilateral actions and the annexation of large parts of the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley not only shows belligerence but also threatens efforts to advance regional peace. These acts are illegal and also risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution, which will have negative consequences for the entire peace process.

The international community must therefore act more decisively now to end the occupation and reset the path towards a viable two-State solution guided by international law. Additionally, South Africa would like to emphasize that any steps taken towards formalizing the annexation of illegally occupied land or territory should not go unchallenged.

Any peace plan for the Middle East cannot allow Palestinian statehood to devolve into an entity devoid of sovereignty, territorial contiguity and economic viability. In that regard, a solution must be premised on a just settlement, with just laws, that is rights-based and that facilitates equality and equity for all who have a right to live in the territories of Israel and Palestine. This includes sovereign equality between States.

We therefore call on the parties and other States to refrain from taking any unilateral action that would jeopardize the two-State solution and remove any option for the parties to find a path towards negotiations in line with international agreed parameters.

South Africa reiterates that the only viable and sustainable option for a peaceful resolution of this conflict is the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders based on those existing on 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and internationally agreed parameters.

The future of the region hangs in the balance. The actions of a few in the coming days and months will determine whether future generations will continue to live under the threat of the scourge of war or if they will be able to enjoy the freedoms and peace envisaged at the founding of the United Nations.

Annex XIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his extensive briefing.

A few days ago, alongside Palestinians worldwide, we commemorated the seventy-second anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba, or catastrophe, in remembrance of the pain of countless victims of occupation, discriminatory treatment, violations of fundamental human rights and continuing aggressive unlawful practices by the Israeli occupying Power over the course of more than seven long decades. Nakba Day constitutes a renewed occasion for Tunisia to reaffirm its commitment to maintaining its steadfast and principled support for the Palestinian cause and the indivisible and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are not time-bound.

It is high time that the international community as a whole, and the Security Council in particular, assume their responsibility to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by its obligations under international law, put an end to its aggressive policies, cease all settlement activities and refrain from attempts to implement its long-planned illegal de facto annexation of Palestinian land.

Amid alarming rhetoric and constant announcements by Israeli officials of unlawful plans to annex parts of the Palestinian territory, on 30 April, the Council of the League of Arab States adopted resolution 8522, in which the Arab Ministers of Foreign Affairs unanimously affirmed that,

“the implementation by the Israeli occupation government of its plans to annex any part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, constitutes yet another war crime added to the long record of Israeli atrocities perpetrated against the Palestinian people”,

and called upon the international Quartet to convene an urgent meeting to salvage the prospects for peace and the two-State solution.

This is a moment of truth for all of us. In the light of the speech of the Israeli Prime Minister asserting Israeli sovereignty over the Israeli colonies in Palestinian territories, starting on 1 July, and considering that the annexation of parts of those territories is a priority of his Government, the international community must react by upholding international law, including the relevant Council resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), and strongly rejecting and preventing any such unilateral illegal move, which would undermine all efforts to revive the peace process.

This Israeli Government attitude once again demonstrates its complete disregard of international law and is a blatant violation of the relevant Council resolutions and the agreements signed with the Palestinians. It is well known that the denial of rights, the persistence of injustice and oppression, and continuing aggressive practices against defenceless civilians all lead to frustration and exacerbate feelings of helplessness and persecution, which will make the situation in the region even more complex and undermine any prospects for peace.

The Palestinian people are facing the unprecedented challenges posed by the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic, on top of the already harsh living conditions due to Israel's illegal occupation and collective punitive measures, including through the seizure of Palestinian tax revenues. The endless Israeli blockade has also created an alarming humanitarian situation in Gaza.

We stress the need for the international community to continue to express its solidarity with and support for the Palestinian Authority, including public health response and economic recovery efforts. Likewise, substantial and urgent support

for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is also essential to help meet the most pressing needs of Palestine refugees.

In conclusion, we reiterate Tunisia's commitment to peace and international legitimacy as a strategic choice, as well as to its principled position that security and stability can be restored in the region only through a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution, as set forth in the Arab Peace Initiative, and the internationally endorsed terms of reference. That peace must ensure the establishment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and must resolve all final status issues. That would usher in a better future of stability and prosperity for all the peoples of the region.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mladenov for his briefing.

I would like to begin by welcoming the swearing in of the new Israeli Government. The United Kingdom looks forward to working with that Government on a whole range of bilateral and regional issues, not least peace in the Middle East.

However, we remain deeply concerned about the prospects of the annexation of parts of the West Bank. Annexation of any part of the West Bank by Israel would be a clear violation of international law and would profoundly damage efforts to restart peace negotiations. We instead encourage the new Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work towards a lasting agreement based on a two-State solution.

To that end, the United Kingdom appreciates the proposals that the Palestinian Authority has made for renewed dialogue. As part of this, we look to the Palestinian leadership to offer detailed proposals for a settlement and find a means of restarting discussions with the United States, which retains a key role in the Middle East peace process.

We are disappointed by the announcement made by President Abbas yesterday. Now is the time for more cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, not less. Security cooperation is particularly important. Instability is in no one's interest except that of extremists. It is critical that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority work together to meet their obligations under the Oslo Accords and refrain from unilateral actions that could set back the cause of peace.

The United Kingdom remains committed to achieving a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

We reiterate our call on the Government of Israel to halt any activity that makes peace more difficult to achieve. That includes the advancement of settlement plans, including in Givat Hamatos, Har Homa and in the E-1 area. All settlements are illegal under international humanitarian law. Settlement construction in those highly sensitive areas threatens to further undermine the viability of a future Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem. We also remain concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property and the repeated incidents of settler violence. Perpetrators must be held to account.

At the same time, we call on the Palestinian Authority to tackle incitement and anti-Semitism, which create a non-conducive environment for cooperation and negotiations. The United Kingdom strongly condemns the use of racist, hateful or anti-Semitic language.

We remain deeply concerned by the ongoing cycle of violence. Recent weeks have seen the killing of an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier in Jenin and the killing of a number of Palestinians across the West Bank. Among those Palestinians killed was 15-year-old Zaid Al-Qaysiya from Hebron, who died as a result of IDF live fire. Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. The ongoing violence underlines the fact that a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long

overdue. We urge continued calm in Gaza. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians are unacceptable.

Finally, I would like to thank the Government of Israel for pledging, on behalf of Israel, \$60 million to the international fund for vaccines at the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations summit on 4 May. During this global crisis, cooperation is vital, and we continue to welcome the ongoing cooperation between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority towards tackling the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), as well as the important part played by the United Nations.

It is our hope that the positive cooperation we have seen in response to COVID-19 will translate into cooperation to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Middle East peace process.

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

I thank Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. As always, his efforts and those of his team are to be applauded, and I thank him warmly once again. I know that he does not have an easy job and, therefore, there is all the more reason to tell him how much we appreciate the fairness with which he works to address this conflict.

At recent Council meetings on this issue, we have highlighted the encouraging cooperation that has occurred between Israelis and Palestinians in the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Combating the virus, as well as that cooperation, are both still important, but that is not what I am going to focus on here today.

Today I want to speak about what needs to be done to move in the direction of meaningful progress in the Middle East. We listened closely to what each Council member has to say about this matter and what they said in February, March and April. So, I want to note, as I have before, that we understand that many of them have concerns with, and objections to, elements of the Trump Administration's vision for peace.

But statements of concern from Council members will get us only so far. What is needed right now, if we hope to take even a first step in the right direction, is for the parties to sit down with one another. The Council cannot dictate the end of this conflict. We can only encourage the parties to sit down together to determine how they wish to make progress.

For those here who have concerns, I want to stress that this monthly briefing is not where the real problem-solving will take place. It will take place at a table at which both the Israelis and the Palestinians are seated.

The question for us should be not only about our individual concerns. The question is how we can each play a more proactive role in getting the parties to speak directly with one another to address their concerns. If both sides are serious about talking, it is time for them to prove it. And if the Council is serious about wanting to see progress in the Middle East, then I urge all present to look seriously at the steps they can take to encourage direct negotiations.

President Trump presented our vision for peace because we think it is realistic and implementable. We heard this morning about President Abbas's recent announcement. With regard to that, we as the Council need to encourage the Palestinians to see this initiative as an opportunity to realize their aspirations. But it is also a starting point, as I have said many times.

I truly believe that we all want to see an end to this conflict. Moreover, we have all expressed a conviction that conversation between the parties is the only way forward. But if that conviction is sincere, then we must concentrate our efforts on bringing the parties to the table, not on Council statements that, I think, we all have to admit have grown a little bit repetitive.

Let me close by quoting President Trump:

"All humanity should be able to enjoy the glories of the Holy Land. This part of the world is forever connected to the human soul and the human spirit. These ancient lands should not be a symbol of conflict but eternal symbols of peace."

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

We noted with concern the latest developments on the ground, especially the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the illegal settlement enlargement. Given these circumstances, allow me to emphasize the following points.

First, we commend the effective coordination between Israel and Palestine in the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This very positive gesture proves that parties to a conflict can always cooperate if they share the goal of saving people's lives.

However, we remain deeply concerned over the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. A possible outbreak of COVID-19 could bring overwhelming devastation to the already poor health-care conditions and pose a deadly threat to 2 million people there. We call for a full lifting of the Israeli blockade in Gaza to facilitate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We once again express our appreciation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its tireless efforts in the occupied Palestinian territory. Last week Viet Nam pledged a new budget donation to UNRWA, and we wish to see increased support on the part of the international community for the Agency.

Secondly, we share other Council members' concerns about continued settlement activities and the annexation plan for the occupied Palestinian territory. Just two weeks ago, Israel's Defence Minister approved the construction of some 7,000 new housing units in the settlement of Efrat, in the West Bank. Unilateral actions like those are illegal under international law and constitute the biggest obstacle to the peace process. We call on Israel to immediately stop such attempts and to fulfil its obligations under resolution 2334 (2016) and other relevant resolutions.

Thirdly, we are deeply concerned that hostilities are almost an everyday occurrence in the occupied Palestinian territory. Last week there were reports of violent incidents in the West Bank, resulting in the deaths of a 15-year-old Palestinian and an Israeli soldier, and injuring dozens of Palestinian civilians. We urge the parties concerned to refrain from acts of provocation or violence. The peace process can be revived only on the basis of efforts by the parties to de-escalate tensions.

Fourthly, Viet Nam fully supports the mediation efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator. We welcome all other initiatives and efforts seeking a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that ensures the legitimate interests of both Palestinians and Israelis. We urge the Middle East Quartet to play its role in encouraging the long-awaited resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine on the basis of internationally agreed parameters, including the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Finally, we firmly believe that the only viable solution to the conflict is a two-State solution that establishes an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the pre-1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.