



Security Council

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Letter dated 20 November 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 a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, 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 on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” convened on Wednesday, 18 November 2020.

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

(Signed) Inga Rhonda **King**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov**

Allow me first to extend my deepest condolences for their profound loss to the family of former Palestinian chief negotiator and Secretary General of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Mr. Saeb Erekat, as well as to the Palestinian Government and the Palestinian people. Saeb, as we all know, dedicated his life to the peaceful pursuit of justice, dignity and the legitimate rights of Palestinians. He never gave up on negotiations as the only means of ending the occupation and establishing an independent, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State. He stood proudly and firmly for his people.

Sadly, I must also extend my condolences to the families and colleagues of the seven peacekeepers of the Multinational Force and Observers who lost their lives in service last week.

May they all rest in peace.

We meet today as Palestinians and Israelis continue their efforts to prevent and control the spread of the deadly coronavirus disease (COVID-19). After weeks of declining numbers, however, active cases are once again on the rise.

Gaza remains the most immediate and pressing concern. Its crumbling infrastructure, poor living conditions and fragile health-care system make it ill-equipped to face a major spike in cases. Already affected by severe movement and access restrictions, cycles of violent escalation and years of humanitarian and socioeconomic calamity, the 2 million Palestinians living within Gaza's confines would face catastrophic consequences from a major outbreak.

For those reasons, I welcome the Palestinian Authority's decision to restart civilian and security coordination with Israel. I express my appreciation to Israel for confirming that existing bilateral agreements continue to govern relations between both parties, particularly in the context of economic, security and civilian affairs.

I want to thank everyone, particularly our Palestinian and Israeli colleagues, as well as the entire team at the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and our partners, for working hard and putting forward creative and constructive ideas over the past six months so that this significant challenge could be overcome.

I have previously expressed hope that recognition of the interdependence of Israelis and Palestinians could, with political will and leadership, translate into tangible progress towards a resolution of the conflict. Both sides should understand the importance of respecting the validity and continuing force of the framework that they have agreed to govern their relations. Although the existing agreements fall short of meeting the aspirations for peace, security and statehood for the Palestinian people, they provide the basic foundation without which even the beginnings of a return to meaningful negotiations will not be possible.

Eight months into the pandemic, Palestinian unemployment levels are alarmingly high — 121,000 Palestinians lost their jobs in the wake of the first lockdown, and the employment numbers declined by 17 per cent in Gaza. Some 40 per cent of Palestinian households lost more than half their income in this period, and food insecurity rates have soared.

The most recent reports suggest that any recovery will be slow and partial. Women and children continue to bear the brunt of the combined effect of the

pandemic and the socioeconomic crisis across the occupied Palestinian territory, facing an increased risk of violence within their homes and limited access to support services.

In order to address the emergency, the United Nations and its partners have continued to provide critical humanitarian and development assistance. Since the start of the pandemic, close to 85,000 tests and advanced laboratory equipment components have been delivered, as well as more than 5.5 million items for infection protection and control. United Nations agencies and partners have also delivered dozens of ventilators, monitors, beds and other crucial hospital equipment.

In addition, the United Nations has supported several quarantine facilities in Gaza with non-food items, bolstered public communication efforts and trained health-care professionals. Temporary arrangements by the United Nations implemented by the World Health Organization continue to facilitate both the transfer of medical patients out of Gaza and the importation of humanitarian supplies for the Palestinian people. I hope that, with the restarting of coordination, those additional measures will no longer be necessary.

I once again highlight the Secretary-General's call for Israeli and Palestinian authorities to re-examine and improve the nature of their economic relationship. It is as timely as ever and in the interests of both sides to take concrete steps towards addressing the common challenge. The United Nations stands ready to assist in the process.

All sides can take immediate steps to facilitate the movement of goods in and out of Gaza and allow trade to increase between the Gaza Strip, Israel and the occupied West Bank. When health conditions allow, Israel can issue a meaningful number of permits for Palestinian workers and traders from Gaza. Israel should also take steps to advance the many outstanding fiscal files and ensure that sufficient revenues are transferred to the Palestinian Government every month — a minimum of 500 million shekels — to maintain its operations and address the COVID-19 crisis.

While its budget is currently reduced to a minimum, the Palestinian Authority should consider steps to reform its own expenditures, in line with World Bank recommendations, so that it can more effectively provide basic income support to all vulnerable households. I take note of ongoing discussions on the prospect of Palestinian reconciliation and sincerely hope the parties will be able to overcome obstacles to holding long-overdue elections.

In a concerning development, on 3 November Israeli authorities carried out the most extensive demolition in the occupied West Bank in the past decade, destroying over 70 structures, including homes, in the Bedouin village of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, in Area C. Seventy-three people were displaced, including 41 children. Their vulnerability is compounded by the onset of winter and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Home demolitions in East Jerusalem also resumed during the reporting period, after a pause of several weeks.

In total, 153 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and East Jerusalem were demolished or seized. They displaced 96 Palestinians, including 22 women and 51 children, and affecting some 1,400 others. The demolitions and seizures were executed owing to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. In addition, three structures were demolished by their owners to avoid the payment of additional fines.

On 28 October, Israeli authorities cut a donor-funded pipe supplying water to 14 herding communities in the Masafer Yatta area of Hebron, home to about

1,400 people. Amid the pandemic, depriving these communities of water could have particularly grave health consequences.

On 2 November, the Israeli Government informed the High Court of Justice that, during the next four months, it would not demolish the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar. In its explanation, the Government cited COVID-19 restrictions and “additional considerations” as reasons for the delay and said that it would use the additional time to exhaust efforts to reach an agreement with residents.

I reiterate my call on Israeli authorities to cease demolitions, seizures of Palestinian property and efforts to relocate communities in the occupied West Bank. Such actions are contrary to international law and could undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State.

In another concerning development, on 15 November, Israeli authorities opened the bidding process for construction of 1,200 housing units in the Givat Hamatos settlement. If built, the project would further consolidate a ring of settlements between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. It would also significantly damage prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian State and achieving a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. I call for this step to be reversed.

Sporadic violent incidents unfortunately continued in parts of the occupied Palestinian territory during the reporting period, as well. In Gaza, militants fired two rockets and released two incendiary balloons towards Israel during the reporting period, with no injuries reported. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) fired five shells and missiles into Gaza in retaliation. There were also no injuries reported.

With regard to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, one Palestinian was killed and 21 injured, including eight children, in clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations and other incidents. One Israeli soldier was injured in those incidents. On 30 October, Israeli soldiers opened fire on a Palestinian vehicle travelling near Jenin, injuring three children. The circumstances surrounding the incident remain unclear, with the IDF claiming the vehicle posed a threat.

On 4 November, an off-duty officer in the Palestinian security forces, who, according to the IDF, shot towards Israeli soldiers, was shot dead near Huwwara, south of Nablus. On 8 November, a Palestinian man, who reportedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack near Hebron, was injured and arrested by Israeli security forces.

Meanwhile, settlers perpetrated some 17 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in the injury of one child and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated 23 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in four injuries and damage to property. As the olive harvest season continues, there were incidents of settlers damaging Palestinian olive groves and agricultural fields. Over 190 trees were burned or otherwise damaged, and large amounts of produce were reportedly taken.

On a positive note, as in previous years, hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli volunteers joined Palestinian farmers across the West Bank to assist in the olive harvest and provide protection from harassment and violence.

All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable.

As of today, the funding shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) stands at a staggering \$115 million for November and December. For the first time, UNRWA forecasts that it cannot pay salaries and expenses in full, impacting 28,000 staff members.

UNRWA plays an essential part as the main provider of direct and often life-saving assistance to many of the 5.7 million Palestinian refugees.

In order to sustain crucial assistance in the region, including food for 1.5 million destitute refugees in Gaza and Syria, front-line medical care vital to the fight against COVID-19 in 58 refugee camps and education for over half a million students, UNRWA urgently needs \$70 million to meet immediate obligations. I take this opportunity to once again urge the international community to act swiftly and provide the necessary resources for UNRWA to continue delivering its vital services, helping prevent serious risks to stability that the region simply cannot afford.

Moving briefly to regional developments, let me begin by welcoming the first visit of the Foreign Minister of Bahrain to Israel today to meet with Israeli leaders, visit with United States Secretary of State Pompeo and sign several bilateral agreements. I agree with the statement of the Minister earlier today that the future of peace in the Middle East requires a resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and I hope that this development will also contribute to that effect.

Concerning the Golan, while the security situation has remained generally stable, developments that occurred early today continue to show the volatility of the environment. The IDF struck targets in Syria in response to improvised explosive devices that its soldiers found in the vicinity of the ceasefire line. The IDF informed the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that, in response to attempts to harm its forces,

“Israel carried out a retaliatory operation against targets in Syria used by the Iranians and its proxies”.

The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that two Syrian armed forces soldiers were killed by the IDF strike. UNDOF continues to engage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint and remind them of their obligations to respect the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and to avoid any activities that might lead to an escalation of the situation between Israel and Syria.

During the consultations on resolution 1701 (2006) held yesterday, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific briefed the Security Council on the situation in Lebanon in detail. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon also remains calm.

I wish to emphasize that Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a responsibility to explore every opening that can restore hope in the two-State solution. We in the international community must help them resolve the conflict in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

As I have outlined, with the necessary political will, there are practical steps that can be taken by all — steps that can begin to fundamentally change the dynamics between the two sides and set the stage for an eventual return to dialogue. This work must begin in earnest and be accompanied by concrete actions to create a legitimate political horizon.

It is imperative that the Middle East Quartet, key Arab partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders build on recent developments in the region and urgently re-engage on returning to the path of meaningful negotiations. The United Nations remains committed to supporting Israelis and Palestinians in their efforts to return to a legitimate political process that will deliver the long-overdue peace both sides require and deserve.

Annex II**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Karen van Vlierberge**

[Original: French]

I begin by expressing our deepest condolences on the passing away of Mr. Saeb Erekat, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to the Palestinian people and to his family. Saeb Erekat was a tireless advocate of achieving the two-State solution through negotiations.

Belgium shares the vision of a negotiated solution based on the coexistence of two States, with the city of Jerusalem as the future capital of both, in accordance with internationally agreed parameters. We regret to note that the multiplication of faits accomplis runs counter to that goal and risks destroying the possibility of ever achieving it. We once again call on all parties to work towards creating an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations and act accordingly to that end.

Israeli settlement policy and related measures continue unabated. The policy is not only illegal under international law, including resolution 2334 (2016), but is also counterproductive. It undermines all trust necessary for resuming constructive dialogue and credible negotiations.

We share the deep concerns expressed by the High Representative of the European Union following the decision of the Israeli authorities to open the bidding process for the construction of housing units in the Givat Hamatos settlement. The Heads of Missions of the European Union and other like-minded countries were able to see the reality on the ground once again this week. Building settlements in certain sensitive areas is likely to destroy the possibility of Jerusalem becoming a shared capital and preclude contiguity between East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territory. Any initiative of this kind must be condemned in the strongest terms if we are to give achieving a viable and credible two-State solution a chance.

In that regard, it is incumbent upon us to recall our shared responsibility to distinguish in our relevant dealings between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967, pursuant to paragraph 5 of resolution 2334 (2016). Making the distinction also serves as a tool for preventing settlement and annexation regardless of terminology or scope.

The destruction of more than 80 structures in the village of Khirbet Hamsa Al-Fawqa is a distressing example of the alarming increase in the number of demolitions and confiscations, including of humanitarian structures and property, in Area C in the West Bank. The trend is all the more worrisome in the context of the current pandemic and its significant humanitarian impact on already vulnerable communities. We call on the Israeli authorities to cease the demolitions, repair the affected property and provide compensation for the damages incurred, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We are particularly concerned about the demolition of schools. Like all children in the world, Palestinian children have the right to education. Belgium therefore calls on the Israeli authorities not to carry out orders to demolish schools in Ras Al-Tin, Jinba and Khirbet Al-Fakheit, and safeguard the 52 schools in the West Bank that are at risk of being demolished.

We are deeply concerned about the economic and fiscal crisis in Palestine, exacerbated by the suspension of civil and security cooperation with Israel and the current pandemic. We welcome the announcement of the resumption of coordination

between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, based on previous agreements, given its impact on the Palestinian population and as a confidence-building measure. We call on Israel to also take steps to underline its commitment to those agreements.

We call on all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single legitimate and democratic authority. We strongly encourage the holding of democratic elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. In that regard, it is important to safeguard the space necessary for Palestinian civil society and the full exercise of civil liberties.

In conclusion, let me underscore the important role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the absence of a lasting solution, not only for the Palestinian refugees but also for the viability of the two-State solution and regional stability and security. The international community's continued robust and predictable political and financial support is important, especially in the context of the current pandemic.

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

[Original: English and Chinese]

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences on the passing away of Mr. Saeb Erekat, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and my heartfelt sympathies to the Palestinian Government and people and Mr. Erekat's family. Mr. Erekat's lifelong devotion to Palestinian national liberation and the settlement of the Palestinian issue through peaceful negotiations won him great respect throughout the world. As a long-time friend of the Chinese people, he was actively engaged in promoting China-Palestine friendship.

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. The question of Palestine is at the root of Middle East instability. Many people like Mr. Erekat have dedicated their entire lives to the pursuit of a solution. As Secretary-General Guterres said, the international community should continue its crucial work, push to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

We must stay the course of taking forward the political settlement based on the two-State solution. The relevant resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the two-State solution, epitomizing the wisdom and efforts of many generations, remain an important foundation for resolving the Palestinian issue. However the international situation evolves, they must be observed and implemented, and there should be no turning back. Resolution 2334 (2016) unequivocally defined settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories as violations of international law that undermine the prospects for a two-State solution.

China supports resolving the issue of the occupied territories in the West Bank in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and defining the final border between Palestine and Israel through peaceful negotiations. We call on all the parties concerned to refrain from unilateral actions that might aggravate the conflict. In particular, there is a need to abandon annexation plans and stop settlement activities in the occupied territories. The relevant parties should abide by the understanding reached in late August, cease fire, stop violence and avoid an escalation of tensions in the Gaza Strip.

We need to further coordinate and facilitate international peace efforts. During the recent general debate of the Fourth Committee, Member States expressed their views on the situation the Middle East and the Palestinian question and once again set out their expectations for the realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The international community, especially countries with influence on Palestine and Israel, should adopt an objective and impartial, position, actively promote peace and dialogue and make genuine efforts conducive to the Middle East peace process.

Any initiative or plan concerning the Palestinian issue must take into account the voices of regional countries and organizations, especially Palestine, and heed the concerns of all the parties. No plan that deviates from the path of peace in the Middle East will succeed in bringing about lasting peace. Imposed solutions simply will not work. We have noted that President Abbas' proposal for an international peace conference to be held early next year has received positive responses from parties. The international community should strengthen coordination to forge synergy for multilateral peace efforts.

We should put people first and improve the economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine. According to United Nations statistics, since the beginning of this year, 689 Palestinian structures have been demolished, reaching a record high. At the beginning of this month, 76 Palestinian structures were demolished in the West Bank, leaving more than 70 people homeless, over half of them children. China is deeply concerned about this and calls for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and ending the demolition of Palestinian homes, the destruction of Palestinian property and violence against civilians.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to the economic and social development of Palestine. We encourage Palestine and Israel to address the problem of tax revenues through consultations and urge the lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's decision to resume security and civilian cooperation with Israel.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides education, medical and other essential services to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees, while making important contributions to improving the humanitarian situation in Palestine. The Agency now faces massive financial strains. We are deeply worried and echo the Secretary-General's call for the international community to honour its commitments and scale up support for the Agency.

China has actively supported the Agency's work and has increased its annual contributions to the Agency several times. Last month, the health kits donated by China to refugees, both inside and outside Palestine, arrived in the relevant countries. These health kits, containing personal protective equipment, will be distributed through UNRWA to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The consignments of anti-pandemic supplies donated by China to UNRWA medical facilities have left port. These are concrete efforts attesting to China's support for Palestine and other Arab countries in fighting the coronavirus disease pandemic, as well as support for United Nations agencies.

As a sincere friend of the Palestinian people, China firmly supports their just cause and aspirations to establish a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will continue to do all we can to assist Palestine in fighting the pandemic, developing its economy and improving its people's livelihoods. We will continue to make positive contributions to achieve an early, comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

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

[Original: Spanish]

We thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing.

We take this opportunity to extend our deepest condolences to the Palestinian people following the death of Mr. Saeb Erekat, who was instrumental in bringing Israel and Palestine closer in their quest for lasting two-State peace. Although that peace eluded him, we recall how, with pragmatism, determination and diplomatic skill, he was able to advance the aspirations of his people at crucial moments in the peace process.

On another note, we are deeply concerned about the most recent details announced by Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), with regard to the Agency's funding shortfalls and inability to pay the salaries of its staff. We commend UNRWA for its ongoing role in providing humanitarian assistance and for its efforts to promote the development of the Palestinian people. This vital work must continue. We urge donor countries to strengthen their contributions, which are now more crucial than ever.

As for many, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains of great concern to the Dominican Republic. Everyone is aware of the grave state of the health-care system in Gaza. It has been further crippled by the coronavirus disease pandemic, and its collapse is imminent. It appears that the pandemic continues to have an adverse effect on the provision of medical assistance and on the country's economy. That, along with widespread insecurity in the country, the electricity crisis, insufficient access to safe drinking water and the lack of opportunities for young people, results in a dire situation that threatens progress for communities, in particular the country's youth.

The current openness and momentum fostered by agreements to normalize relations between Israel and Arab countries should be used to promote and strengthen direct dialogue between the parties — genuine dialogue that addresses the aspirations and concerns of both sides — with a view to building viable peace for the entire Middle East region. To that end, we welcome news coverage yesterday signalling the readiness of the Palestinian authorities and Israel to resume relations based on previous agreements.

As members of the Security Council, we are called upon to honour and implement the mandate of the Charter of the United Nations to strive for lasting peace and sustainable development. We are therefore compelled to work hard together so that these peoples experience and live peace as the rule, and conflict as the exception.

As members of the international community, we are called upon to be mediators, advisers and builders of mechanisms that help prevent escalating tensions and promote dialogue. We must neither halt nor reduce our cooperation efforts to resolve a conflict that has undermined the progress of a strong and resilient people and of a region that deserves and expects our active participation in promoting peace.

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.

I would like to extend heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people following the loss of the Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee, Mr. Saeb Erekat, whose work and dedication showed the importance of peace negotiations and that Israel and Palestine can work together towards a lasting solution.

Estonia remains convinced that, in order to reach sustainable peace and stability in the Middle East, there needs to be a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We have welcomed the normalization of relations between Israel and three Arab nations — the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and the Sudan. We believe that these are positive steps towards achieving peace and stability in the whole region. We acknowledge the constructive role that the United States played in this regard.

We hope that these regional developments will give impetus to reviving the Middle East peace process and encourage Israelis and Palestinians to take steps towards resolving the conflict and re-engaging in meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues. The only way to achieve lasting peace is a two-State solution through direct negotiations, while taking into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties and Israeli security concerns.

We urge both sides to engage with the members of the Middle East Quartet, which continues to play an important role in efforts towards resuming negotiations, together with other regional players.

Turning to the situation on the ground, we call on all parties to refrain from any unilateral steps that undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We call on Israel to halt the continued settlement expansion and demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem. The recent decisions to open the bidding process for the construction of housing units for a new settlement at Givat Hamatos and the planned construction of close to 5,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank are counterproductive moves.

We also condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror and acts of provocation, incitement and destruction. The two rockets fired from Gaza towards Israeli residential areas last weekend were the most recent example of the continued violence by Hamas and other terrorist groups.

We welcome the announcement by the Palestinian Authority on renewing its coordination with Israel. A full resumption of civil and security cooperation would be an important step towards restoring confidence and improving security on both sides. It would also be an important step from a humanitarian perspective, in the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

It is hoped that the recent agreement by Palestinian factions on holding elections will soon materialize and that a date will be set for holding the elections throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. We also call upon all Palestinian factions to commit to the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process prior to the elections.

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

[Original: English and French]

I thank the Special Coordinator for his briefing.

I, too, wish to express my condolences to the relatives of Saeb Erekat and to the Palestinian people and pay tribute to the commitment of this tireless advocate of the Palestinian cause and ardent defender of peace.

We are at a pivotal point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is more urgent than ever to relaunch momentum towards peace. The parameters of its settlement are well-known — two States, living in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders based on the 1967 lines, both with Jerusalem as their capital. They have been defined with the aim of bringing fair and lasting peace to the region. They make it possible to guarantee the security of Israel and to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians, in accordance with international law.

It is now up to the parties to define the framework for their negotiations in order to resume their discussions with the support of the international community. France stands ready to work to relaunch this process in close coordination with all its partners. It calls for an end to all unilateral measures jeopardizing the two-State solution.

We are concerned about the proliferation of settlement expansion projects and the record number of demolitions of Palestinian structures, including those financed by the European Union and its member States. These measures come after the signing of the normalization agreements between Israel, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and the Sudan, which could lead to the beginning of a positive dynamic for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

France condemned new announcements concerning the building of more than 1,200 housing units in the Israeli settlement of Givat Hamatos, in East Jerusalem. The expansion of this settlement undermines the viability of a future Palestinian State, as repeatedly recalled by the European Union. We also condemned the demolition by Israeli authorities, on 3 November, of the Palestinian village of Khirbet Humsa, in the West Bank.

We once again call on Israeli authorities to reverse their decisions on settlements and to halt all demolitions, particularly the village of Khan Al-Ahmar and the school in Ras Al-Tin, in accordance with its obligations as an occupying Power.

The suspension of annexation projects must become a definitive measure and must not be replaced by annexation through increasing faits accomplis on the ground, which would be tantamount to a de facto annexation of Palestinian territories.

France calls on the parties to create conditions conducive to the resumption of discussions. This is the focus of the continued efforts of Minister Le Drian, in coordination with his German, Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts. Restoring confidence requires gradual commitments from both sides. We welcome the announcement of resumed coordination between Israelis and Palestinians and the reaffirmation, in part, by Israel of its commitment to past bilateral agreements. This cooperation can lead to a better response to the coronavirus disease pandemic.

This requires renewed intra-Palestinian reconciliation. It is important that the elections announced by President Abbas at the General Assembly in September (see

A/75/PV.10) are not postponed again. All parties must play their part to advance peace. The parties expected to show courage are the United Nations and its agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which must be supported politically and financially, and every member of the international community. They must all play their part.

Members can count on France to contribute tirelessly to this collective effort.

Annex VII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Günter Sautter**

Let me start by extending our sincere condolences on the passing away of Saeb Erekat. He was a champion for Palestinians' rights and self-determination and a passionate advocate for a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Israel through negotiations. We call on all political leaders in Israel and Palestine to honour Mr. Erekat's legacy by continuing to actively pursue a peaceful and negotiated two-State solution.

Unfortunately, the latest developments and negative trends on the ground imperil the prospect of a negotiated two-State solution on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. These developments increasingly entrench a one-State reality.

We reiterate our grave concern regarding the publication of tenders for the construction of housing units in an entirely new settlement in East Jerusalem, namely, Givat Hamatos. After the recent decision by the Israeli authorities to advance the construction of more than 4,900 settlement building units in the occupied West Bank, this is another counterproductive move at a critical point in time. Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories remain illegal under international law. They severely undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and for a viable and contiguous Palestinian State within the framework of a negotiated two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. As we have emphasized jointly with our European partners in numerous discussions with the Government of Israel, these steps also weaken efforts to rebuild trust and confidence between Israelis and Palestinians, with a view to resuming dialogue. We call on Israel to reverse these negative decisions and to immediately cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in sensitive areas around East Jerusalem, such as Givat Hamatos, Har Homa and Area E-1.

We are also concerned about the increasing seizures and demolitions of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. The demolition of Palestinian housing in the village of Khirbet Hamsa Al-Fawqa, in the northern Jordan Valley, which left 11 families homeless in the midst of the coronavirus disease pandemic, is the most recent incident in a worrisome trend of confiscations and demolitions since the beginning of the year. We call on Israel to observe its obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular those set out in the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, in the occupied Palestinian territories and to halt all such demolitions.

The suspension of plans to annex parts of occupied Palestinian territories must become permanent. We re-emphasize that we will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. Furthermore, we remind all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with their obligations under international law, in particular resolution 2334 (2016).

Germany remains committed to a negotiated two-State solution, where two sovereign, democratic and independent States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines. This is the only viable path to fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis for a life in peace and dignity and with equal rights. And reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also the only path to achieving sustainable peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

We therefore call on both sides to refrain from unilateral action and recommit to their signed agreements. In this regard, we welcome yesterday's announcement by the Palestinian Authority to restore cooperation in adherence to those agreements. It is an important step to building confidence. We hope and expect that Israel will also take steps to underscore its commitment to the two-State solution and signed agreements, while seizing the positive dynamics of the normalization agreements in recent weeks.

Together with Egypt, France and Jordan, we will continue our efforts and offer our active support in facilitating a path back towards cooperation, credible dialogue and serious, meaningful and effective negotiations on all final-status issues.

We reiterate our call on both sides to fully implement resolution 2334 (2016), with all its provisions, that is, not only with regard to settlement activities but also with regard to all acts of violence against civilians, acts of terror, settler attacks, destruction, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric.

Let me also reiterate Germany's condemnation of all attacks and threats against Israel by Hamas and other terrorist groups, including the repeated firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation and reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratically elected Government remain essential for achieving the two-State solution. We therefore hope that parliamentary and presidential elections in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and Gaza, will take place soon. The European Union is ready to support the holding of elections, and we call on Israel to do its part.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a major provider of stability in the occupied Palestinian territories. Therefore, Germany is very concerned about UNRWA's substantial funding gap, amounting to \$70 million, until the end of this year. The reduction of salaries for 28,000 UNRWA teachers, doctors and nurses is imminent and will lead to further distress among Palestine refugees. We call on all other countries to do more and appeal to their solidarity. Germany is the largest donor to UNRWA, with \$200 million this year alone.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations

I would like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing on the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

I also take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences on the passing away of Saeb Erekat, a tenacious negotiator and a prominent voice of the Palestinian cause. It is truly a great loss, not only for his family and the Palestinian people but for the international community. Sadly, peace did not come during his lifetime. Our job is to ensure that it is not too late for millions of Palestinians. On that note, I would like to share three pertinent points.

First, we must continue forging the path to peace based on international consensus. It is important that the international community remain committed not only to a credible multilateral process but to protecting the internationally agreed consensus concerning Palestine. Indonesia therefore reiterates its support for convening an international peace conference and for a resumption of talks with all the relevant parties on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, Indonesia reaffirms the importance of the intra-Palestine unity talks, while underlining the unity of Palestinians in overcoming the challenges facing their cause and in creating an environment conducive to achieving a negotiated peace.

Secondly, the expansion of illegal settlements must stop. The Israeli authorities continued their path of violations and complete disregard for international law earlier this month by approving yet another illegal settlement expansion. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, this illegal settlement expansion is the largest in the forced displacement operation of Palestinians in more than four years.

Although there is little need to say it, these settlements are illegal and in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Despite Israel's promise to suspend the annexation and of a new era of peace and development in the region, it is obvious that, in practice, its creeping annexation remains as active as ever, as does the inhumane and degrading treatment to which Palestinians are subjected.

We continue to urge the international community to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements and underscore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, statehood and independence, within the pre-1967 borders, and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Thirdly, we must continue to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We welcome the renewal of the Agency's mandate and the international community's unequivocal support for its important work. In this challenging and difficult time, UNRWA continues to work on the front lines of the crisis, providing education, health and social services. However, the Agency continues to confront the dire financial crisis that jeopardizes its ability to provide services and assistance to the region. Indonesia therefore again appeals to the international community to extend its full support to UNRWA's vital work and to match its political commitment with sufficient and predictable financial contributions.

Once again, we have found ourselves discussing the Palestinian question. But we are here discussing it because of continued violations by Israeli authorities and the systemic impunity that allows it. The late Saeb Erekat once said that international law is the civilized means to achieve our goals, our independence and our freedom.

International law and United Nations resolutions on the status of Palestine are very clear, and yet the Israeli authorities continue to violate them and deprive the Palestinian people of their homes, their rights and their dignity. The Security Council needs to stand with the Palestinians and with international law.

Annex IX**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Niger to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

The Niger has followed with great concern the recent developments in the region, in particular the demolition by Israeli forces of structures and property belonging to the Palestinian community in Khirbet Humsa, in the West Bank. Israeli excavators and bulldozers spared no homes, animal shelters, latrines or even sanitation facilities during this large-scale operation. We should be deeply concerned about the cruel and traumatic plight suffered by these poor people, many of them children, as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to claim victims and as winter gradually sets in.

The Niger deplures and condemns such acts, which, moreover, are counterproductive in the light of efforts within the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and incompatible with the obligations of the State of Israel under international humanitarian law. The demolition and destruction of private property in the occupied territory violate the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). The lack of building permits, very often cited by the Israeli authorities to justify operations, is also dubious, since such permits are almost never issued to Palestinians who request them.

We therefore call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, not to turn a blind eye to the threat posed by Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territories. The demolition and expropriation of Palestinian structures must stop. The colonization established to manage these territories must also end.

We call on Israel to respect the principles of international law and to refrain from any measures to the contrary that could distract us from the prospect of a resumption of peace talks towards a negotiated two-State solution, as supported by the international community. In this regard, the trend to normalize relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours in recent months and the announcement made by the Palestinian Authority yesterday of its intention to resume civil and security cooperation with Israel should serve as a springboard for resuming peace talks for a just and equitable solution to the crisis.

My delegation wishes to express its great concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities. Since the first cases of community transmission recorded in August, the spread of the virus in Gaza has continued to worsen. There are now thousands of active cases, which the health system, suffering from a lack of medical personnel and equipment, is struggling to absorb. Long before the pandemic, the situation of the inhabitants of Gaza was already of the utmost concern due to factors such as extreme poverty, food insecurity, overpopulation, high unemployment, restrictions on gasoline imports imposed by the Israeli authorities, the precariousness of the health system and the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has lasted 13 years. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must have the means to continue providing vital services to thousands of Palestinian families in need, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the Niger welcomes the tireless efforts of Mr. Mladenov and reaffirms its full commitment to supporting the efforts of the international community towards a swift settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has an undeniable impact on the peace, stability and security of the entire Middle East region.

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

[Original: Russian]

At the outset, we would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved and to the leadership and people of Palestine on the passing away of the Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Saeb Erekat. We note his personal contribution to efforts towards a just solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with the established international legal framework, including resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly.

We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Russia adheres to the time-tested principle that the comprehensive stabilization of the situation in the Middle East is impossible without a lasting solution to the Palestinian question. We maintain constructive and friendly relations with all States in the region, hence why we consider the improvement of Arab-Israeli relations to be beneficial in principle.

However, we proceed from the understanding that a just settlement of the Palestinian question based on the international legal framework endorsed by the United Nations, including Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the fundamental principle of a two-State solution, must be an inherent part of any Arab-Israeli settlement. That framework provides for the establishment of an independent, sovereign and territorially contiguous Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and living in peaceful co-existence with Israel.

The entire range of final-status issues should be resolved during direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. The international community should focus its efforts on resuming the negotiation process. President Mahmoud Abbas reiterated his readiness for dialogue under the auspices of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators. We call upon our Quartet partners — the United Nations, the European Union and the United States — to strengthen cooperation to that end. We are prepared to engage in dialogue with key regional stakeholders. We are convinced that one-sided action will never lead to a breakthrough, and that it will be essential to make joint efforts and fully leverage the potential of collective diplomacy.

We view the resumption of contact between the Palestinian and Israeli parties as a first step towards reinstating the dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. We welcome this step taken by the Palestinian leadership, which is undoubtedly aimed at backing efforts to redress the difficult socioeconomic situation on the Palestinian territories and enhancing the joint response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as promoting cooperation in the area of security. We call on both parties to uphold their obligations in accordance with earlier agreements.

In order to ensure the implementation of those agreements, both parties must abstain from any aggressive or provocative rhetoric or actions. As the Special Coordinator informed us, on 15 November the Israeli authorities opened the bidding process for the construction of more than 1,000 housing units in East Jerusalem. We are concerned by that decision, which runs counter to the international legal framework for a Middle East settlement. The construction of a new block of settlements in the Givat Hamatos area would detach East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and violate the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian State provided for in United Nations Assembly resolutions.

We reaffirm our principled position regarding the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. We call for the cessation of settlement activity and the policy of demolishing Palestinian property. Annexation plans must also be definitively taken off the table. At the same time, we condemn all violence and missile launches against the Israeli territory. Such actions must stop. There is also an urgent need to join efforts in order to counter the terrorist threat.

The task of restoring Palestinian unity remains highly relevant. We will continue our efforts on this front and continue to assist our Egyptian colleagues.

Active international measures are necessary in order to improve the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are extremely concerned by the reduction in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The work of UNRWA encompasses both a humanitarian and a political dimension and significantly contributes to stabilizing the situation on the Palestinian territories and across the Middle East region. Russia will continue supporting UNRWA and calls on the international community to do the same.

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

First of all, let me thank Mr. Mladenov for his informative briefing.

On behalf of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the family of the late Mr. Saeb Erekat, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Chief Negotiator for the Middle East Peace Process. Mr. Erekat will be remembered for his great contributions and tireless efforts in defending the just Palestinian cause. In that regard, we also offer our solidarity to President Abbas and the people of Palestine as they mourn this great loss.

Amid this sombre moment, we are reminded of the human costs of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). While we grapple with the ever-growing social, economic and political costs of the pandemic, we must also spare no effort to save lives. For that reason, we are concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where continued instability creates fertile ground for increased transmission of the deadly virus. We are, however, heartened by the Palestinian Authority's recent announcement to resume security and civil coordination with Israel. That is indeed a positive step, and we encourage further cooperation between the two parties to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

Despite repeated international calls for the cessation of all settlement activities, Israel continues to methodically plan, tender and build new settlements while expanding existing ones. Most recently, the non-governmental organization Peace Now reported that the Israel Land Authority had announced the opening of tenders for more than 1,200 new structures in the Givat Hamatos settlement. The construction and expansion of settlements are not only grave violations of international law and numerous relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), but are also a direct violation of Article 49 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. The settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remain a serious obstruction to peace, and we therefore call on Israel to cease their construction and dismantle existing ones.

Moreover, we remain deeply concerned about the political, physical and socioeconomic division of Gaza and the West Bank, which remains another major obstacle to advancing the prospects for peace. My delegation reiterates today the call to Israel to lift the Gaza blockade.

To achieve peace and security there is no better alternative than dialogue. For that reason, we reiterate President Abbas' call for an international conference in 2021 under the auspices of the United Nations and the Middle East Quartet. We urge the relevant parties to make every effort to convene such a timely international conference.

I now wish to turn to the needs of Palestinian refugees, many of whom are located in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At this critical time when the needs of Palestinian refugees are increasing, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East needs international support to address its financial shortfall. We urge donor States to fill the large funding gap by providing additional funding to the Agency's budget.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the need for the Security Council to speak with one voice on matters concerning Palestine and to move decisively towards a just and durable solution that will allow the Palestinian State, along the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live side by side and in peace and security with Israel.

Annex XII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matjila

Let me begin by expressing my deepest sadness at the passing away of Mr. Saeb Erekat. The people of South Africa extend their sincere condolences to his family and all the Palestinian people. It is people of his calibre and stature who are required on both sides of this conflict in order to bring about a peaceful, long-lasting solution.

I also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing on the realities on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work that he and his Office do in contributing to the resolution of this conflict.

I also wish to express South Africa's condemnation of Israel's continued and abundant illegal actions. On 3 November, the Israeli Government conducted its largest demolition of Palestinian property in a decade. Israeli authorities destroyed the Bedouin village of Khirbet Humsa, in the Jordan Valley. They destroyed 76 structures, including homes, animal shelters, sheds, sanitation facilities and solar panels, leaving 74 people, including 41 children, homeless and exposed to the harsh elements.

In 2020 alone, Israel's illegal actions have left 869 people homeless and 689 structures demolished. In addition, the destruction of agricultural and farmland also continues, which severely affects Palestinians' ability to provide a reliable source of food and generate a valuable source of income. The widespread destruction of property, including agricultural land, and the forcible transfer of protected people in an occupied territory are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which all of us are signatories.

Such actions continue to violate Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), and, in the current context, are simply inhumane, especially in the light of the ongoing global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

In addition to Israel's continued illegal demolitions, illegal settlement activity continues in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Over the weekend, Israeli authorities approved a tender for over 1,200 housing units in Givat Hamatos, in East Jerusalem, in addition to previously approved settlements in the West Bank. All of those illegal settlements would severely damage prospects for a contiguous Palestinian State and any possibility of sustainable peace.

South Africa once again wishes to remind Israel and Council members that such settlement activity is illegal under international law and in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

Israel's combined illegal actions of continued demolitions, including donor-funded structures, and settlement activities all contribute to Israel's illegal de facto annexation plans. While Israel and its allies may not call it annexation, the evidence that we have heard today and many times before in the Chamber points to continued de facto annexation.

As we have done previously, South Africa calls on the Security Council to hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions, which are in contravention of Council resolutions as well as international law. If such events were to occur in relation to almost any other issue on the Council's agenda, we would not have hesitated to take action. The double standards perpetrated by the Council only undermine its credibility and ability to fully implement its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

South Africa shares the significant concerns of Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), regarding the Agency's financial situation. UNRWA is an essential service provider for Palestinian refugees across the Middle East region. UNRWA's health, education, protection, social services and humanitarian assistance programmes are vital to millions of displaced Palestinians. UNRWA's dire financial situation is also jeopardizing its ability to fully pay the salaries of 28,000 staffers in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan.

This comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is spreading across the Middle East, including through Palestinian refugee camps. Many of those refugees have no alternative to UNRWA assistance. South Africa therefore appeals to the international community to support the efforts of UNRWA in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees.

The only way to reach a viable solution to the conflict in the Middle East is through direct talks between the parties, on an equal footing, based on internationally agreed parameters that take into account the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people. No peace plan or initiative can have any merit or success if all parties to the conflict are not included in such talks, as equal partners, from the very beginning. Conflicts can be resolved only by treating each party as part of the future solution, and not as a potential adversary or ally.

In conclusion, a viable peace plan should not 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. It must be rights-based and facilitate equality for all who have a right to live in the territories of Israel and Palestine, as well as sovereign equality between States.

Annex XIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations

[Original: Arabic]

I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing and his ongoing efforts.

I should like to add my voice to those that preceded me in paying tribute to the memory of the Palestinian fighter and leader Saeb Erekat, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, member of the Fatah Central Committee and head of that organization's Department of Negotiations Affairs.

The late Mr. Erekat and an entire generation of fighters and activists who put their faith in peace were unable to see their efforts and steadfastness crowned by an end to the occupation and embodied in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. The question remains, how long will the plight of the Palestinian people continue and when will justice be achieved and security and stability prevail throughout the region?

The answer is clear to all. It lies in implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council and the realization of a two-State vision based on internationally agreed terms of reference and agreements between the two sides. That is the way to bring about an end to the occupation and establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to reach fair and lasting resolutions of the final-status issues.

The international community has been engaged with the just Palestinian cause. It has demanded that the Palestinian people should exercise their legitimate and inalienable rights and that the occupation authorities should end their repressive practices and expansionist and racist policies that contravene international law. Unfortunately, what reality reflects is a blatant challenge to the international community and the Security Council by the occupying Power and a disregard for international conventions and United Nations resolutions, in the complete absence of any kind of accountability or punishment.

There can be no greater testament of this than the record high number of housing units included in Israeli West Bank settlement plans for 2020, which reflects a systematic strategy to make Israeli annexation plans a fait accompli that threatens the integrity of Palestinian territory. In the face of this dangerous situation, Tunisia reiterates its condemnation of the colonial policy being pursued by Israel, its absolute rejection of annexation plans and its insistence that such plans must be abandoned once and for all. Tunisia also emphasizes the need for the Security Council to carry out its responsibilities in this regard, in particular by ensuring the implementation of its relevant resolutions, the most recent of which was resolution 2334 (2016).

In the face of continued provocation, demolition of homes and schools, economic sanctions and the targeting of unarmed civilians, Tunisia warns that the continuation of such practices will serve only to exacerbate feelings of despair and injustice and increase the levels of tension and strain. Tunisia renews its call for protection for the Palestinian civilian population in accordance with the principles of international law in implementation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/20 of 2018. Tunisia also welcomes the call issued by a number of United Nations agencies and international organizations on 5 November 2020 for protection for Palestinian farmers from violence by Israeli settlers, against both their persons and their crops, and for perpetrators to be held legally accountable.

At the same time, in the face of the magnitude of the suffering being undergone by Palestinian citizens in the Gaza Strip as a result of the continued unjust siege and the policy of collective punishment being implemented by the occupation authority against some 2 million Palestinians, we call on the international community and the relevant actors to make every effort to bring about an end to the siege that has been imposed on the Gaza Strip for some 14 years and to put a stop to the humanitarian suffering, which has only been magnified by the coronavirus disease pandemic. In that regard, we salute the extraordinary efforts of health and relief workers in the face of the pandemic and call on the international community to act to make up the budget shortfall at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East so that the agency need not curtail its vital activities.

As we celebrate the thirty-second anniversary of the declaration of the State of Palestine, Tunisia reaffirms its firm belief in the justness of the Palestinian cause, its admiration for the sacrifices of the Palestinian people and its unwavering and principled support for their inalienable rights — which carry no statute of limitations — and, above all, their right to the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The international community has once again demonstrated its embrace of the just Palestinian cause with the adoption of a package of draft resolutions on Palestine at the closing of the proceedings of the Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. It must now translate its robust efforts of the past few months into a revival of the peace process and the launch of earnest and credible negotiations between the two sides to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In that regard, Tunisia supports efforts to advance the initiative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to convene a full-fledged international conference attended by all the parties concerned to engage with the peace process on the basis of international law, international legitimacy and the agreed terms of reference. We reiterate that Tunisia stands ready to contribute to any constructive attempt to end the occupation and restore to the Palestinian people their full legal rights.

We once again stress that the inclusion of the Palestinian side in any efforts or initiatives aimed at resolving the Palestinian question is a prerequisite for ensuring that a fair and lasting solution for this crucial issue is arrived at.

We also reiterate that we welcome the good-faith efforts of our brothers in Palestine to support national reconciliation, which we consider a necessary step towards consolidating internal ranks to help bring about the desired settlement in accordance with the two-State solution.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

I wish to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

As others have done, I would like to start by reflecting on the tragic passing away of Saeb Erekat. I echo the words of my Prime Minister and my Foreign Secretary in offering our condolences to Mr. Erekat's family, President Abbas and the Palestinian people. Mr. Erekat dedicated his life to dialogue, Palestinian rights and advancing the cause of peace. He will be sorely missed.

It is with Mr. Erekat's legacy in mind that we must renew our commitment to acting through dialogue, building trust and cooperation and avoiding the unilateral and inflammatory steps that undermine the cause of peace.

As we have made clear repeatedly in the Security Council, the United Kingdom opposes annexation and welcomes its suspension. Any other unilateral action that jeopardizes the physical viability of a future Palestinian State is also unacceptable. The United Kingdom condemns the Government of Israel's publication of tenders for construction in the East Jerusalem settlement of Givat Hamatos, an extremely sensitive area of the West Bank. Settlements are illegal under international law and remain an obstacle to peace and a threat to the two-State solution.

The United Kingdom also expresses its serious concern following the demolition of Humsa Al-Baqai'a by the Israeli Authorities on 3 November. That act caused the displacement of vulnerable Palestinians, including 41 children, as well as unnecessary suffering. The year 2020 has seen the highest levels of demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures since 2016. The United Kingdom calls on the Government of Israel to cease this policy and provide Palestinians with a clear, transparent route to construction in Area C of the West Bank. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions are a violation of international humanitarian law.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned by the situation in Gaza, particularly at this time of a global pandemic. We continue to urge the parties to prioritize progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. We encourage actors to put forward long-term, sustainable proposals to resolve the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants in Gaza. We call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel.

We note the Commissioner-General's urgent call for additional funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) this month, without which schools will close from the beginning of December. We call in particular on States that have cut their funding significantly in recent years to support UNRWA now. I note that this year the United Kingdom has given over \$65 million, which is commensurate with previous years. We are sympathetic to those who argue that UNRWA must do more to reach a secure and sustainable financial footing, but that cannot be achieved by 1 December, and money is needed by then to avoid unnecessarily adding to the suffering of refugees.

This week we saw the historic first ministerial visit of the Kingdom of Bahrain to Israel. Normalization agreements show that the Arab world and Israel can pursue a positive path, away from hostility and towards a more peaceful, prosperous region.

With dialogue in mind, my Government therefore welcomes reports that the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel will return to cooperation and abide by signed agreements. Full cooperation across financial, security and health matters puts the needs and security of Israelis and Palestinians first. That is an example of the dialogue and compromise that we have called for, which will be required to make meaningful progress towards a two-State solution. Both parties should now seize that positive momentum and show commitment to their bilateral agreements through their actions on the ground.

Seventy-three years ago this month, the United Nations decided on the partition of Palestine. Piece by painful piece over many years, progress was made towards an agreed partition — a two-State solution. As the region takes strides towards dialogue, it is time, too, for the parties to the Israel-Palestine conflict to stop dismantling peace and start building it again.

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

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing today. We are grateful for his efforts to keep the Council aware of the latest developments on the ground.

We also offer our sincere condolences to the Palestinian people, and to Ambassador Mansour on the passing of Saeb Erekat. May he rest in peace, may the region continue to move toward more peaceful days, and may the Palestinians and Israelis soon resume long overdue peace talks. Towards that goal, we welcome the Palestinian Authority's recent announcement that it will resume security cooperation with Israel and begin accepting tax revenues again.

The Abraham accords have made peace all the more possible. We are witnessing the accumulating fruits of the accords with each passing day. It is no overstatement to say that the accords have triggered a wave of commercial, educational and cultural interactions in the Middle East that are without recent precedent.

Entrepreneurs from the accord countries are already developing partnerships, including on innovative food and agriculture initiatives. Earlier this month, the first flight from Israel travelled to Dubai, carrying Arab and Jewish Israelis and opening a new chapter for tourism and citizen diplomacy.

Israel and Bahrain are also finalizing aviation agreements to allow regular flights between their nations starting in January. And just today, the first Bahraini commercial flight landed in Israel, carrying senior officials who will work with Israel to deepen their cooperation, including through the reciprocal opening of embassies by the end of the year.

In addition, Israel and Sudan continue to make progress on various economic initiatives and partnerships and have recently indicated they will begin cooperating in agriculture, water and the common fight against the coronavirus disease. These and other positive developments stem from President Trump's bold diplomacy and a genuine readiness in the region to transform hostility into peace.

Forty-three years ago, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat became the first Arab leader to officially visit Israel. As we recall that courageous step and its legacy, we are reminded of the powerful dividends that come with peace. It is clear that the Abraham accords have created a real momentum, and it is my sincere hope that the Palestinians will seize this moment. The United States vision for peace provides a flexible framework for negotiations. The vision's recommendations are not written in stone. Its outcomes are not fixed. It is an invitation to resume the path towards peace. It is rooted in good faith, good intentions and reality. There are two places set at this table.

We are quickly putting decades of diplomatic failure behind us. The time is long overdue for these monthly meetings to be repurposed by replacing counterproductive rhetoric that only serves to perpetuate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with Member States encouraging the parties to sit down for realistic, direct negotiations to resolve their differences.

Today's meeting and future monthly meetings would serve the region better if the focus were on grave threats that affect millions of people. The economic and the political crisis in Lebanon has driven much of its population into poverty, with no prospects for progress as long as Iran continues to sponsor the terrorist organization Hizbullah.

Millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons face the hard months of winter that are approaching, and countless Yemeni children are malnourished because the Houthi rebels disrupt the delivery of urgently needed aid. These humanitarian catastrophes and conflicts should be our primary focus at meetings such as this.

I urge support for the Palestinians and the Israelis in their efforts to settle their decades-long dispute by encouraging them to take these very great steps. Let us put these monthly meetings to better use.

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

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

Viet Nam would like to express our condolences to the Government and the people of Palestine for the passing of Mr. Saeb Erekat, Palestinian Chief Negotiator and Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. We highly value the contributions made by Mr. Erekat to the struggle for independence of the Palestinian people and the search for a just and long-lasting solution for the Middle East Peace Process.

We welcome the recent statement of the Palestinian Authority that it was willing to return to negotiations with the Israeli Government on the basis of United Nations resolutions and international laws. Viet Nam hopes that the long-stalled negotiations will be resumed soon. The Security Council and the wider international community should create all favourable conditions for the negotiations to be successful. We are encouraged by the recent easing of tensions among countries of the region, as well as measures and initiatives conducive to promoting regional peace and security.

We also welcome all initiatives for international cooperation that may help achieve a just, sustainable and long-lasting solution to the Middle East peace process on the basis of international law and relevant resolutions of the United Nations. In this connection, we note the Secretary-General's response to the call for an international conference for peace in the Middle East by President Mahmoud Abbas and look forward to working with him on this matter.

While welcoming the recent positive dynamics in the region, we are concerned about continued violence in many places, which causes civilian casualties and widens the gap between the parties. Israel's continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank and its demolitions of Palestinian houses remain a major obstacle to finding a lasting and sustainable solution. Recently, the high rate of demolitions of Palestine structures in the West Bank are particularly worrying. These acts violate international law and weaken the prospects for the realization of the two-State solution.

We therefore call upon the parties to refrain from taking actions and making statements that could complicate the situation and make it more difficult for negotiation and dialogue. All acts of violence and hostile rhetoric must cease.

We remain concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories due to the coronavirus disease pandemic and worsening economic recession. We reiterate our calls for the lifting of the Gaza blockade so as to ensure access to basic services and humanitarian aid. We also call for an end to the restrictions, attacks and intimidation aimed at Palestinian farmers during the olive harvest season. Those acts continue to be a major source of violence and put more pressure on the economic challenges of the Palestinians. We also hope that the two sides can reach an agreement to resolve the tax withholding issue in the face of the humanitarian and financial crises.

In this regard, we would like to commend the role of agencies, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in alleviating the plight of the Palestine people. In light of UNRWA's continuing financial shortfalls, we urge the international community to provide UNRWA with the funding necessary to ensure the continuity of its indispensable operations.

To conclude, we would like to reaffirm our solidarity with and consistent support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, as well as the two-State solution for the establishment of an independent State of Palestine coexisting in peace with the State of Israel along the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as its capital.
