



Security Council

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Letter dated 28 January 2021 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 briefings provided by Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and His Excellency Mr. Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, as well as the statements delivered by Their Excellencies Mr. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Mr. Simon Coveney, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Ireland; Mr. Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico; Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway; Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; Mr. Rein Tammsaar, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia; Mr. Mohamed Ali Nafti, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, and by the representatives of China, France, India, Kenya, the Niger, 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 Tuesday, 26 January 2021. Statements were also delivered by His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Observer State of Palestine, and the representative of Israel.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, the European Union, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia, Peru, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the 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) Tarek Ladeb
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland**

I am honoured to address the Security Council for the first time in my capacity as the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and by the trust bestowed upon me in this role by the Secretary-General, the parties and the members of the Council.

I thank the Palestinian and Israeli Governments for their warm welcome and look forward to our initial meetings in the coming days and weeks.

I wish to join the Secretary-General in welcoming the presidential decree issued by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections this year. The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine. The United Nations stands ready to support efforts for the Palestinian people to exercise their democratic rights. Elections are a crucial part of building a democratic Palestinian State built on the rule of law with equal rights for all. The forthcoming talks in Cairo to resolve outstanding issues related to the holding of elections will be important for the planned preparatory process to move forward.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis continues to take a staggering toll across the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. Concerted efforts to contain and halt the spread of the virus have succeeded in lowering the overall number of active cases in the West Bank and Gaza, but the cost in lives and livelihoods remains high, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

As a result of the ongoing spread of the pandemic, Israeli and Palestinian authorities extended or tightened movement restrictions in most areas during the reporting period, significantly impacting daily life and limiting access to basic services.

The United Nations and its partners continue to support the Palestinian Government's effort to control the COVID-19 pandemic through the delivery of personal protective equipment, oxygen therapy machines, testing materials and other critical equipment.

Through the efforts of the World Health Organization and UNICEF, the United Nations is also supporting the Government's preparedness to receive and eventually administer vaccines. The Palestinian Government is working to procure a supply of vaccines and anticipates support through the global COVAX Advance Market Commitment facility. The initial allocations of vaccines to cover priority groups are expected in the first half of 2021.

At the same time, Israel has launched a large-scale vaccination campaign for its citizens and residents. In that context, the United Nations continues to encourage Israel to help address the priority needs of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories and to support COVID-19 vaccine availability more generally. That will be critical for the broader efforts of both Governments to control the pandemic and is also in line with Israel's obligations under international law.

Israel has worked closely with the United Nations and its partners throughout the course of the pandemic to ensure that equipment and supplies are delivered throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. It is important that the same level of engagement and cooperation be sustained with regard to the delivery of vaccines.

As I noted earlier in my opening remarks, President Abbas issued a long-anticipated presidential decree on 15 January stating that legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections would be held later in the year. According to the decree, legislative elections will take place on 22 May, followed by presidential elections on 31 July and Palestinian National Council elections on 31 August.

I also note the amendment of the elections law raising the quota for female representation from 20 to 26 per cent. I welcome that step and join the Secretary-General's call on Palestinian authorities to take further steps to facilitate, strengthen and support women's political participation, including as voters and candidates, throughout the electoral cycle.

The United Nations has continued its engagement with the Palestinian Central Elections Committee in support of free and fair elections and stands ready to support the Committee and the Palestinian people as plans for elections progress.

In a separate development in Israel, on 23 December 2020, the Israeli Knesset dissolved after failing to pass a budget, and general elections were scheduled for 23 March.

In a concerning development, on 17 January, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 800 housing units in Area C settlements. The following day, on 18 January, Israeli authorities published tenders for some 1,900 units in Area C and an additional 210 units in East Jerusalem. Of the units advanced and tendered, the majority are in settlements in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank. More than 200 units are located in illegal outposts that Israeli authorities are retroactively regularizing under Israeli law.

On 19 January, the Jerusalem District Court denied a request for an interim injunction to freeze the tendering process for some 1,200 units in Givat Hamatos. The bidding period for the tender closed on 18 January, and winning bids were announced on 20 January.

I reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and are a major obstacle to peace. They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 71 Palestinian-owned structures, including 19 residential structures, displacing 73 Palestinians, including 17 women and 37 children. The demolitions and seizures were executed owing to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Israeli forces also bulldozed agricultural land and more than 2,000 Palestinian-owned trees, claiming they were planted on State land.

On 23 December, the Magistrate Court in Jerusalem ruled in favour of a settler organization, upholding an eviction order against four Palestinian families in the Batan Al-Hawa section of the Silwan neighbourhood, in East Jerusalem.

I urge Israel to cease demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and to allow Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to develop their communities.

Violent incidents, unfortunately, continued throughout the reporting period. On 25 December, Palestinian militants in Gaza fired two rockets towards Israel, which were both intercepted by the Iron Dome system. On 26 December, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retaliated against what it said were Hamas targets in Gaza. As a result, three Palestinian civilians were injured, including a 6-year-old girl, and damage was caused to civilian structures.

On 18 and 19 January, three additional rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel, with two landing in the sea off Israel's southern coast and one reportedly landing in an open field, causing no damage or injuries. The IDF retaliated by striking what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, with no injuries reported.

On 23 January, an explosion reportedly caused by materials stored in a house in Beit Hanoun resulted in injuries to 47 people, including 19 children and 15 women.

Turning to the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, two Palestinians, including one child, were killed after reportedly carrying out attacks against Israelis, and 63 Palestinians were injured, including two children and two women, in clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations and other incidents. Eight Israelis, including two soldiers, two women and one child, were injured by Palestinians during the reporting period.

On 21 December, a 52-year-old Israeli woman was found killed in a forest near the settlement of Tal Menashe in the occupied West Bank, having been attacked with a stone. On 24 December, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian man in the village of Tura, near Jenin, on suspicion of the killing in a premeditated attack. According to Israeli authorities, he subsequently confessed to the killing. Four other Palestinian men were also arrested in connection with the killing.

On 21 December, a 17-year-old Palestinian opened fire at an Israeli police post in the Old City of Jerusalem and was subsequently shot and killed by the Israeli security forces.

On 1 January, a Palestinian man was left paralysed after being shot by live ammunition by Israeli forces in the Al-Rakeez community, in the southern West Bank, during a dispute between Palestinians and the Israeli forces over the seizure of an electricity generator. An initial Israel Defense Forces internal probe found that the shooting was accidental and happened in circumstances where the soldiers feared for their lives, an account disputed by Palestinian eyewitnesses. The IDF opened a further inquiry into the incident.

On 5 January, a Palestinian man was shot dead by the Israeli security forces at the Gush Etzion junction, in the West Bank, after he allegedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack. The man's body is being withheld by Israeli authorities.

I reiterate that the Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Particular care should be taken to protect children from any form of violence. Furthermore, the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres violates international law and must stop immediately. There can be no justification for attacks against civilians.

There was an increase in settler-related violence throughout the reporting period. That increase took place in the aftermath of the death of a 16-year-old boy from the settlement of Bat Ayin while he was being chased by Israeli police on suspicion of throwing stones at Palestinians.

During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 45 incidents in which Israeli settlers and others injured Palestinians or reportedly damaged their property, resulting in 22 injuries and damage to property. In two separate incidents in East Jerusalem and Al-Lubban Ash-Sharqiya, near Nablus, a boy and a man were physically assaulted and injured.

Meanwhile, Palestinians perpetrated some 55 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in six injuries and damage to property. On 3 January, a woman was critically injured by a thrown rock while driving near Deir Nidham, close to Qalqilya.

All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable.

On 23 December, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian peace and the latest developments on the ground. I look forward to engaging with my counterparts very soon to identify concrete steps to bring the parties back to the path of meaningful negotiations.

On 11 January, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan met in Cairo to discuss ways to advance the Middle East peace process. In their joint statement following the meeting, the Ministers emphasized their support for the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, United Nations resolutions and international law, rejected unilateral steps and urged all parties, including the Quartet, to take steps towards launching negotiations.

Briefly turning to the region, on the Golan, the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained despite the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties, leading to increased tensions.

There were also reports of air strikes attributed to Israel on locations in Syria on 25 and 30 December and on 6, 13 and 22 January, resulting in casualties. On 6 January, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) personnel observed kinetic activity in the UNDOF area of operation involving the firing of anti-aircraft tracer rounds from the north-east across the area of separation, with two of them exploding mid-air. UNDOF personnel heard aircraft activity on the Alpha side and explosions on the Bravo side.

UNDOF continues to liaise with both parties to remind them of their obligation to respect the terms of the Disengagement Agreement and prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

In Lebanon, consultations to form a Government continue. Participants in the 2 December Paris conference, co-chaired by the United Nations and France, expressed support for the Lebanese people and took stock of the response to the 4 August Beirut port explosion. Participants expressed concern about the political deadlock and worsening socioeconomic situation.

While the situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon area of operations was generally stable, tensions remained high. There were increased violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel and incidents of weapons-pointing across the Blue Line between the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

As we contend with one urgent crisis after another, we must not lose sight of our overarching goal — supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict, end the occupation and achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, based on the 1967 lines, United Nations resolutions and international law. That solution must reflect that both peoples have an undeniable historic bond with this place, that its holy sites are deeply important to three world religions and that both peoples have a right to live on it independently and as free peoples.

Despite the significant challenges, achieving that outcome remains possible, and there are opportunities unique to this moment that should not be missed. I join the Secretary-General in welcoming the agreement signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. I hope that the promise of the recent agreements made between Israel and Arab countries will lead to a situation where a more peaceful Middle East can be realized. However, it requires leaders on all sides to re-engage meaningfully and return to the path of negotiations. I look forward to working with Palestinians, Israelis and Quartet partners, along with Egypt, Jordan and other regional and international stakeholders, to ensure that we create and preserve the necessary conditions for progress.

In that context, allow me to reiterate that the financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remains a serious concern. The Agency is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, but is also critical for regional stability. I renew the Secretary-General's appeal for support.

I assume this role with deep appreciation for the crucial work that is being carried out every day by United Nations personnel on the ground, and I look forward to working with Deputy Special Coordinator Lynn Hastings and together with the entire United Nations family to support the peace process and redouble our collective efforts to strengthen the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, in line with our respective mandates.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my predecessor for his perseverance in his role and his friendship to me personally, both now and in my previous capacity. Nickolay Mladenov's performance as Special Coordinator is a hard act to follow.

I intend to continue Mr. Mladenov's efforts to speak openly and frankly with all sides. I will support and encourage Israelis and Palestinians in pursuit of peace, urge them to refrain from taking damaging unilateral steps and help to create an environment conducive to dialogue. I humbly request the Council's support in these efforts.

Annex 2**Briefing by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States,
Ahmed Aboul Gheit**

[Original: Arabic]

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the holding of this important meeting at a most opportune time. We have a window of opportunity — one that may close quickly — to overcome the dangerous impasse that has stymied the political process between Palestinians and Israelis in recent years.

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories remains the longest and most complex conflict and, at the same time, the issue that most affects interactions in the Middle East. Unfortunately, this central issue, whose resolution could provide an unprecedented opportunity for real and sustainable prosperity and stability for all the peoples of the region, has, in recent years, been either ignored and deliberately disregarded or addressed erroneously, dangerously and recklessly. A highly complex issue has been considered from one point of view, and rights have been seen from the perspective of one party, as if the other party, which is under occupation, did not exist, or as if it were required merely to comply with something imposed on it as a fait accompli, rather than offered to it.

For the last four years, the Palestinians have come under unprecedented pressure from the outgoing United States Administration. Beyond the political sphere, that pressure has been felt at the humanitarian level since the United States froze its funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, a lifeline and source of stability for around 5.5 million Palestinian refugees. Despite the seriousness of these and other unjust measures, political positions remain firmly entrenched and highly dangerous. For decades, the United States has played the role of mediator on the basis of a formula that is acceptable to both sides — Palestinians and Israelis — namely, an end to the occupation and the establishment of the independent State of Palestine. That formula is known as the two-State solution and, in recent years, it has been marginalized by the main mediator in the peace process. That marginalization has encouraged the Government of Israel to intensify its settlement activity and threaten to implement such dangerous and destructive projects as the annexation — de jure or de facto — of occupied territory.

The former United States Administration laid a new foundation for a settlement based not on the recognized terms of reference, or even negotiation between the parties, but by fait accompli, as if this conflict had no history and no one had any memory of it, and as if previous settlement efforts had been in vain and a waste of time and effort.

The international community, represented by this Council, continues by consensus to view the two-State solution as the only acceptable means of ending the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and to view the establishment of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as illegitimate and illegal. The declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel continues to be seen as illegal and contrary to the logic of a negotiated solution. The international community continues to believe that the 1967 borders must be the point of reference in the definition of the future borders between the State of Israel and the independent State of Palestine.

In the next phase, a great deal of concerted, coordinated and common effort will be required on the part of all parties interested in peace in the Middle East, in order to reaffirm the two-State solution, together with its well-known and agreed-upon international terms of reference, in preparation for the launch of a serious peace

process with a clear timetable, designed to settle the conflict once and for all rather than manage it or coexist with it. We hope that the new United States Administration will correct those unhelpful measures and policies and work, with the support of influential regional and international actors, to get the political process back on track. That will give the Palestinian people renewed hope that the international community will do justice to its noble ambition of, and long struggle for, freedom and independence.

In that regard, I welcome the recent announcement by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, of a date for presidential and legislative elections, and for elections to the Palestinian National Council, as an important step on the road to Palestinian unification. I call on the international community to support the Palestinian decision and help with the holding of elections throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which has seen three Palestinian elections in the past.

Lastly, I hope that serious direct talks between the Palestinian and Israeli parties, under international and Arab auspices, will begin as soon as possible to achieve a two-State solution on the ground, taking advantage of the favourable climate resulting from the recent peace agreements concluded by Israel and certain Arab States.

I would like to thank you once again for holding this important session, express my appreciation to the Secretary-General and congratulate the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, whose extensive expertise will undoubtedly bring added value in the establishment of peace in the region.

Annex 3**Statement by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph E. Gonsalves**

I thank His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ali Nafti, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, for convening today's important open debate. I also thank the briefers for their informative remarks. In addition, I wish Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, every success in advancing the peace process and sustaining it to a successful conclusion, in accordance with his mandate.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved only through direct peace negotiations. To that end, we reaffirm the importance of the Middle East Quartet and the regional players in promoting effective dialogue and compromise to settle the long-standing differences between Israel and Palestine, with the support of international partners. In an effort to address the impasse between the parties, we echo President Abbas' call on the United Nations to convene, in early 2021, an international conference to launch a genuine peace process.

In addition, honouring the Palestinian people's long-held quest for self-determination and statehood by revisiting the question of full membership at the United Nations is a matter that is long overdue and an essential component of a lasting two-State solution in the drive for sustainable peace in the Middle East. Peace and security within well-defined, internationally acceptable borders for Israel and Palestine are central requisites for any lasting settlement.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains deeply concerned about the critical situation in the occupied Palestinian territory as a result of the unlawful measures and practices by Israeli authorities. In that connection, we reiterate that all settlement activities, including the recently announced plans to build 800 housing units in the West Bank, as well as tenders for construction of a new settlement of over 2,500 housing units, violate international law. We are also concerned about reports of settler violence against Palestinians, including children, and we call for adherence to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and all relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

The critical socioeconomic and security situation in Palestine, as well as the attendant humanitarian consequences, demand urgent attention. As Israel's 13-year blockade continues to deprive millions of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip of their fundamental rights, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the hardship experienced by the Palestinian people. We therefore call for the immediate lifting of the blockade and all forms of coercion against the Palestinians. The unprecedented funding shortfall for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has caused a significant decrease in the vital services provided to Palestinian refugees across neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Syria. In that regard, we reiterate our calls to the international community for increased assistance to be distributed swiftly to those in need.

Further, we remind Israel, as the occupying Power, of its legal responsibility to provide medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccinations to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. While vaccine nationalism can produce short-term results at a domestic level, no country will be safe from COVID-19 until every country and everyone is safe. We acknowledge the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to secure as many vaccines as possible, including through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility. We take this opportunity to encourage international support for the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to secure vaccines, and we call for further

support for the COVAX facility. When vaccines do arrive for use in Palestine, the unimpeded and quick passage through Israeli checkpoints will be critical to allow for their distribution without further delay.

Before closing, I will turn to the internal political situation in Palestine. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines commends the ongoing efforts of the Palestinian people to advance democracy in a mature and well-organized manner. We welcome the announcement by President Mahmoud Abbas of the holding of parliamentary elections on 22 May, presidential elections on 31 July and Palestinian National Council elections on 31 August.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains firmly supportive of the Middle East peace process, within the framework of international law. We continue to support all efforts towards a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. In order to achieve that, we need to facilitate dialogue between Israel and Palestine. Let us act with urgency to get this process on the road.

Annex 4**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Ireland, Simon Coveney**

This will be my last intervention during Tunisia's presidency, so I want to warmly acknowledge the excellent work of the team, in Tunis and in New York. Let me also take the opportunity to send my best wishes to Foreign Minister Jerandi for a speedy recovery.

I welcome Foreign Minister Al-Malki and Ambassador Erdan to the Council. Ireland looks forward to working constructively with Palestine, Israel and the wider international community during our term on the Council.

We also welcome Special Coordinator Wennesland and thank him for his comprehensive briefing. Let me assure him of Ireland's strong support as he takes up his new responsibilities.

Finally, I want to welcome the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit. Ireland works closely with the League and appreciates the important role it plays regionally.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement to be made by the Head of Delegation of the European Union (annex 30).

In his final speech to the Security Council on the Middle East, the late Kofi Annan reminded his listeners that

“the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just one regional conflict among many. No other conflict carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge, even for people far away” (*S/PV.5584, p.2*).

His words still ring true in Ireland, where there is great public and political interest in the peaceful resolution of this conflict, which has gone on for far too long.

Ireland's approach to the Israel-Palestinian conflict is based on respect for international law and the agreed international parameters. We are firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution that ends the occupation that began in 1967, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, on the basis of international law, including all relevant Council resolutions. We know that will not be easy. Progress requires dialogue, and ultimately there can be no substitute for direct negotiations between the two parties.

During the lowest moments of our own peace process in Ireland, we never lost sight of the need for what was called then the “duty of hope”. We encourage the Council to renew its commitment to tackle the most intractable conflicts that we face. It is time to look afresh at how we can assist Israelis and Palestinians to bring new momentum to resolving this conflict.

Confidence-building measures, such as the resumption of cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority last December, which can help build trust, are vital and should be encouraged and supported. The engagement of the parties themselves, and that of international partners, is critical to opening the way for dialogue.

Ireland welcomes the bilateral agreements between Israel and United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, the Sudan and Morocco. Those new partnerships have the potential to contribute to a just and peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestine issue. We encourage regional partners to identify concrete ways to build trust and cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

We salute the efforts of Egypt, Jordan, France and Germany in the Munich format to lend momentum. We want to see a reinvigorated role for the Quartet, and we look forward to a fresh engagement by the United States Administration.

We are interested in learning more about President Abbas' proposal for an international peace conference and how such an initiative could align with other international efforts to bring new impetus to the peace process.

We welcome the presidential decree issued on the 15 January by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections this year. The holding of elections in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza is a crucial step towards Palestinian unity and reconciliation, giving a voice to Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and renewing the legitimacy of national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government.

We stand ready to assist with free, fair and inclusive elections. And we echo the Secretary-General's call on the Palestinian authorities to facilitate, strengthen and support women's political participation throughout the electoral cycle.

Last month the former Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, briefed the Security Council (see S/2020/1275) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Ireland reaffirms its position that all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory is illegal under international law. Israel's latest decisions to advance plans for the approval and construction of thousands of new settlements in the West Bank, are contrary to international law.

I am extremely concerned at the Israeli decision last week to award a tender contract for the construction of housing for an entirely new settlement, in Givat Hamatos. I urge Israel to reverse that decision and halt all continued settlement expansion, including in East Jerusalem and other sensitive areas. Continued settlement activity is not only illegal, but it also erodes trust between Palestinians and Israelis.

The acceleration in demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in recent months is also deeply concerning. Making already vulnerable Palestinians homeless in the midst of a global pandemic is unacceptable. We call on Israel to halt demolitions, the number of which in 2020 was the highest since 2016, according to Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and to allow for legal construction for Palestinian communities.

As part of our commitment at the Council to ensure accountability, Ireland will continue to speak out against unilateral actions that fail to respect the resolutions of the Council and are in breach of international humanitarian law.

We also speak out clearly against violence. The missiles from Gaza into Israel must stop; disproportionate Israeli military retaliation must stop; the attacks against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, by Israeli settlers or by Palestinians, must stop.

Ireland is a proud supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose programmes deliver essential services to Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the region, and I have visited many of them myself. I urge others within the region and beyond, including the new United States Administration, to step up and fund UNRWA. Its vital work needs support now more than ever. We are particularly concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip, where 80 per cent of the population depend on humanitarian assistance. The rise in coronavirus disease cases has affected children

in Gaza in need of access to life-saving medical treatment. Once again, Ireland calls on Israel to lift the illegal blockade of Gaza.

Ireland stands with Palestinian and Israeli people alike as they battle that dreadful virus. Ending the worst effects of the pandemic requires constructive cooperation to support timely, effective and unimpeded vaccination of all in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

I also want to address important regional issues, which we will have an opportunity to discuss again, I hope, in much more detail.

We welcome the Al-Ula Declaration of 5 January by the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Egypt and thank all of those who made it possible. The Declaration represents a key milestone in the development of closer regional integration and stability, and we hope that progress can be made and built on.

The terrible conflicts in Yemen and Syria continue to drive unimaginable humanitarian suffering and instability across the region. We must redouble efforts towards their resolution and continue to provide pivotal assistance to all those who need it. Of course, there will be a time for a detailed discussion in relation to Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. I note the comments that have been made in relation to that, and I look forward to a detailed debate on that at a future moment.

Let me conclude as I began, by quoting the late Kofi Annan. In that final address to the Council on the Middle East, he said,

“the Quartet ... retains its validity because of its singular combination of legitimacy, political strength and financial and economic clout. But the Quartet needs to do more ... to create the conditions for resuming a viable peace process. It needs to engage the parties directly in its deliberations ... and to be clearer at the outset on the parameters of an endgame deal. And it will have to be open to new ideas and initiatives.” (*ibid.*, p. 5)

I can think of no better guidance today as we once again look at this important task.

Annex 5**Statement by the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, for their detailed briefings on the situation in the Middle East, and I commend the Tunisian Minister of State, Mr. Mohamed Ali Nafti, for his excellent leadership of the presidency of the Security Council during the month of January. I also recognize the participation of ministers and other high-level officials from Council members. I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Al-Malki, and the delegation of Israel.

In this first debate of the year on the situation in the Middle East, it is important that we reflect on how the Security Council can contribute to the resumption of negotiations for a solution to the conflict in the region. It is encouraging to have new actors in the Council and beyond to give renewed momentum and a collective approach to this issue.

We therefore welcome Mr. Wennesland as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and express our appreciation for Mr. Nickolay Mladenov's many years of work in carrying out that responsibility.

Our objective is clear — to promote a comprehensive and final two-State solution to the conflict that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and allows for the establishment of a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, as well as the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. It is essential to reaffirm the political commitment to the search for a negotiated settlement.

The responsibility for resuming the peace process lies, in the first instance, with the commitment of Israel and Palestine. The international community must encourage, facilitate and support that process in order to guarantee a just and sustainable peace in the region.

Mexico is especially interested in multilateral initiatives to achieve a negotiated solution, whether through the possibility of a revitalization of the Quartet or the convening of an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations, as has been proposed by Palestine. Any diplomatic initiative to cement peace in the region is welcome.

At the current juncture, the parties must refrain from actions that hinder the peace process. Mexico believes that it is essential to uphold the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which stresses that the cessation of Israeli settlements is fundamental to the two-State solution. Settlement activity, as action contrary to international law, including international humanitarian law, represents an obstacle to efforts to reach a lasting solution that will bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians. Therefore, and in accordance with the above, we condemn the expansion of settlements and call for an immediate halt to their expansion, as well as a halt to the demolitions of Palestinian structures, in order to reverse the negative trends on the ground.

Mexico hopes that the recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab countries represents an important step towards stability and provides an opportunity to broaden mutual understanding and relaunch the Middle East peace process.

We welcome progress in the intra-Palestinian dialogue and stress the importance of holding presidential, legislative and Palestinian National Council elections in the near future. The support of the international community is essential for a peaceful and democratic electoral process to take place.

As long as the conditions for a political solution and a lasting peace are not in place, it will be hard to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population. That is why all parties must avoid violent actions and ensure that the human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians are respected and protected. In that regard, Mexico strongly condemns the attacks by organizations in Gaza against Israel and the disproportionate responses to those attacks.

The humanitarian situation was already complex, but the coronavirus disease pandemic has had serious economic, social and humanitarian consequences for the population in the West Bank and especially in Gaza. The pandemic has highlighted the need to resume and expand economic and financial cooperation between Palestine and Israel, as well as to facilitate the safe passage of people, goods, medical equipment and supplies, and vaccines.

Mexico appreciates the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in addressing the basic and humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees, mainly in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Its work continues to be instrumental in providing education and health services to Palestinian refugees.

Mexico recently made a new financial contribution of \$750,000 to the Agency to support the continuity of its operations for the Palestinian population, one of the most vulnerable in the region.

As a country committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Mexico will continue to support all efforts aimed at establishing a lasting peace in the region, based on mutual respect and in full compliance with the rule of law.

Annex 6**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Ine Eriksen Søreide**

I thank Tunisia for the initiative and Minister of State Mohamed Ali Nafti for chairing the meeting today. Please also pass on my warm regards, Mr. President, to Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi. I wish him a speedy recovery. Let me thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing and congratulate him on his appointment. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his dedication and skilful leadership during the past five years.

As an elected member of the Security Council, Norway will work to promote the resumption of negotiations on outstanding final status issues. Negotiations should build on the previous agreements between the parties and be based on international law, relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. We will explore ways in which the Council can be a dynamic, constructive partner in this process.

Like the other Council members, Norway strongly supports a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is preordained that Israelis and Palestinians live side by side. The path to doing so in peace goes through the establishment of two States within secure and recognized borders. That is the only sustainable way to realize the legitimate national aspirations and safeguard the security and dignity of both peoples. Moreover, it is the only approach that has the commitment of the Israeli and Palestinian leadership and is supported by international consensus.

For a future two-State solution to work, it must be viable. A Palestinian State cannot exist unless there is an end to the occupation and the preconditions required for economic growth are in place. Only a prosperous Palestine can ensure stable revenues for the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian State needs strong and transparent institutions, so our support for reforms must continue.

We welcome the announcement of the forthcoming Palestinian elections. The Palestinian people deserve a State that is democratic, based on the rule of law, with security, equal rights and opportunities for all. A viable State requires national unity and a unified government, accountable to its people. Furthermore, pending a just and agreed political solution for Palestine refugees, it is our shared responsibility to ensure that United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has the resources it needs to continue delivering on its mandate.

The achievements of the Palestinian State-building process deserve recognition. Cooperation between the parties is crucial and ongoing. The international community remains committed in its support. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), chaired by Norway, is still the central mechanism for enabling the parties and the international community to uphold the institutions and the platforms of cooperation needed to build a future Palestinian State.

At the AHLC meeting on 23 February, Norway will call for increased international support for these purposes. There is an urgent need to solve outstanding fiscal issues, ensure continued banking relations and further develop cooperation arrangements. The meeting will also focus on the situation in Gaza and the need to maintain calm, open for access and mobility and complete ongoing projects to build basic infrastructure. Further efforts to combat the coronavirus disease pandemic in Palestine, including vaccine distribution, are also urgently needed.

Norway has joined the Security Council with the fundamental belief that it is possible to peacefully settle even entrenched conflicts through dialogue, peace diplomacy and coordinated international support. During its term on the Council, Norway will draw on its long-standing experience and network of contacts in the region. Our policy is to speak and listen to everyone.

The primary responsibility for moving negotiations forward lies with the parties. I encourage them to take steps to create mutual trust and foster a public atmosphere conducive to negotiations on all final-status issues. It is our duty as members of the Security Council to support them. We should work together to identify areas of common ground and to create it where there is none.

A proven success factor for building conditions that are conducive to peace is the mobilization of civil society and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels and in all phases of the process. While the Security Council attaches importance to the women and peace and security agenda, it is often overlooked on the ground.

Norway will remain an outspoken defender of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in all conflict situations on the Council's agenda. We will continue to speak out to enhance the protection of civilians, in particular children.

The Security Council has repeatedly expressed the position that all Israeli settlement activities on occupied Palestinian territory are illegal under international law. Those activities severely undermine the prospects for a two-State solution by eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent and sovereign Palestinian State. Norway is particularly concerned by the ongoing settlement activity in key areas of the West Bank.

Violent conflicts elsewhere in the region have a negative effect on the possibilities for negotiated peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Similarly, an unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be an impediment to regional stability. That having been said, we see glimmers of hope in the region. Norway welcomes the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab States, facilitated by the United States. Regional integration is key to promoting economic and social development. The agreements that have been reached do not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but they create new regional dynamics that we should take advantage of in our efforts to promote peace and stability.

A window of opportunity is opening for broader international efforts to support bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The modalities for such talks can take many forms. The Security Council and such initiatives as a reinvigorated Quartet will be important to ensuring a process that is both credible and successful.

Peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians has been elusive and is long overdue. Mindful of the challenges and the obstacles, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that serious negotiations are resumed. We have no time to lose.

Annex 7**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov**

[Original: Russian]

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to our Tunisian friends for convening today's meeting in a timely fashion. Clearly, a candid exchange of views in the Security Council on the Middle East settlement is long overdue. It is necessary to review the previous stage, identify the reasons for the continuing deadlock and outline the key areas of joint work for the future.

The goal of achieving a sustainable and comprehensive Middle East settlement should remain a focus for the international community. The Palestinian issue continues to have a major influence on the overall situation in the Middle East and North Africa. This region is experiencing the disastrous aftermath of the geopolitical experiments in the wake of the "rules-based order" concept promoted by our Western colleagues.

Clearly, the steps to dismantle the international legal framework for a Middle East settlement approved by the Security Council and replacing collective diplomatic efforts with "art of the deal" diplomacy cannot produce the desired outcome. On the contrary, such unilateral actions delay the prospects for a just settlement of existing problems. Importantly, the process of normalizing Israel's relations with the Arab States, which was launched in 2020 and which we welcome, should be aimed at stabilizing the Middle East region rather than at being used to put the Palestinian issue aside until, as they say, better times.

The first step towards resuming the peace process should include reaffirming Security Council resolutions and other fundamental documents, including the Madrid principles. This approach would focus on Israel's illegal settlement activities, plans to annex occupied Palestinian territories, the status of Jerusalem, the refugee problem and the borders. All of those issues should be determined through direct political dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Israel's legitimate security concerns must be addressed. The two-State solution remains the basis for a sustainable settlement benefiting both sides.

We are convinced that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the only organization that provides effective assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in neighbouring Arab countries. International financial support for UNRWA activities must continue.

In conjunction with our Egyptian and other partners, we will continue to help the Palestinian political movements restore unity among their ranks based on the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Overcoming the inter-Palestinian split will create conditions for a serious dialogue with Israel, stabilize the situation in general and improve the humanitarian situation in and around the Gaza Strip.

We consider it important to step up as soon as possible the international efforts supporting the restart of direct Palestinian-Israeli talks in order to resolve a number of fundamental issues concerning a final status. We are convinced that, to ensure progress on this path, we need to use the mediating functions of the Quartet of international mediators, which is the only legitimate mechanism approved under Security Council resolutions. We are confident that, in close cooperation with the parties to the conflict and key Arab countries, the Quartet can play an effective part in the settlement.

Russia was receptive to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' initiative to convene an international conference on a Middle East settlement. Our country has advocated holding such a forum from the beginning, a fact enshrined in resolution 1850 (2008). To support this initiative, we propose holding a ministerial meeting in the spring or summer of 2021 with Russia, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union — as members of the Quartet — and four Arab countries, namely, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and of course, Israel and Palestine. It is also important to invite Saudi Arabia, as it was the drafter of the Arab Peace Initiative. Such a meeting could become a working platform for a comprehensive analysis of the situation and help the parties start a dialogue.

Taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by today's meeting, I would like to again note Russia's willingness to host a Palestinian-Israeli summit in Moscow, as the sides requested earlier. We are open to discussing these and other proposals. We will appreciate any comments. We encourage our regional and international partners to accept our invitation to start a dialogue in order to find ways of undertaking collective action in the name of establishing peace and stability in the Middle East.

Annex 8**Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia,
Rein Tammsaar**

I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing. I wish him success in his new role and look forward to supporting him in his efforts. I also welcome Secretary-General Aboul Gheit and thank him for his statement.

Estonia continues to support all efforts aimed at resuming meaningful negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians on all final status issues, based on international law, relevant Security Council resolutions and agreed parameters. We look forward to engaging in this regard with the members of the Middle East Quartet and the regional players, including the League of Arab States.

We view positively the normalization of relations between Israel and certain Arab States, which hopefully gives impetus also to reviving the Middle East peace process, with the aim of achieving a two-State solution. We have welcomed the decision by the Palestinian Authority to resume civilian and security coordination with Israel and call upon both parties for further mutual steps to improve prospects for resuming peace negotiations.

We welcome the decree by President Abbas on holding legislative, presidential and National Council elections. It is essential that all relevant stakeholders support holding free, fair and inclusive elections involving all Palestinians throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon all Palestinian factions to commit to international law and democratic principles prior to elections. We call on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections across the entire Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Estonia calls on all parties to refrain from any unilateral steps that might undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We call for the prevention of any acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, provocation, incitement or destruction. We also call on Israel to halt ongoing settlement expansion and demolitions taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel's latest decisions to advance plans for the approval and construction of settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including in Givat Hamatos, are worrying and contrary to international law.

Finally, I would like to join others in reiterating the important role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays in the stability of the region, including its efforts to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus disease on Palestinian refugees. We are deeply concerned about UNRWA's critical financial situation. Estonia has increased its support to UNRWA in recent years and urges all countries to continue or increase their support to the Agency as well.

Annex 9**Statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad, Mohamad Ali Al-Nafti**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to convey to you, Mr. President, the greetings of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad, Othman Jerandi, who is unable to preside over this meeting, and to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for your positive interaction with the initiative of the Tunisian presidency of the Security Council to hold this ministerial meeting. That interaction confirms the importance accorded by the Security Council to Middle East issues, particularly the just Palestinian cause.

I welcome the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and wish him success in his duties. I appreciate the important information and valuable guidance that he provided in his briefing, which will, I hope, be the starting point for the desired active contribution to United Nations, international and regional efforts to advance peace in the Middle East.

On behalf of the other members of the Council, I extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to the former Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable efforts throughout his tenure.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, for his briefing, which reflected the League's important role in supporting United Nations and international efforts to address issues in the region, in particular the central issue, namely, the question of Palestine.

This meeting is being held as the international community celebrates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations and commemorates the first meeting of the Security Council in January 1946. The Palestinian people is not participating with us in these celebrations. For seven long decades, it has groaned under a brutal occupation, without losing faith in international law or the role of the United Nations and its various bodies, particularly the Council, in upholding its legitimate rights in order to support peace and security in the Middle East and worldwide.

Today we call for an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, for the continuation of work to stop the aggressive policies of the occupying Power and for an end to that Power's systematic practices of killing, displacing and detaining Palestinians in flagrant violation of all human rights, demolishing homes, expanding settlements, profaning holy sites and violating international human rights law and international humanitarian law, practices that result in tragedy and suffering.

Despite many decades of international efforts, dozens of resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly and the conclusion of agreements, successive Governments of Israel have ignored and even violated those resolutions and have taken unilateral measures as part of a policy of faits accomplis in order to change the legal and historical status of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. The nations of the world unanimously agree that the situation is illegal and threatens the prospects of a just and peaceful solution.

We must therefore ask ourselves whether we can continue to live with the loss of faith, on the part of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples, in international law, the United Nations and the international community in general. Can we continue to accept the fact that the occupying Power has not been properly held to account for seven decades of violations and disregard for Council resolutions?

It is unacceptable for this situation, which has serious implications for the peoples of the region and for international peace and security, to continue. As much as we value the efforts made to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the long-standing Palestinian issue, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, we hope that the Council and the international community will make a quantum leap in their approach to the just Palestinian cause, in order to break the deadlock that has prevailed for years, marshal the international desire for peace and put an end disregard for United Nations resolutions.

The President of the Republic of Tunisia, Kaïs Saïed, attaches particular importance to the Palestinian cause, which he considers his personal cause, and which is a top priority in our country's foreign policy, particularly during our current membership of the Council. With Mr. Saïed's support, Tunisia has always sought to promote peaceful, just and lasting settlements to various unresolved international issues, particularly the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legal requirements.

We therefore call today for a comprehensive and unified international initiative, coordinated among the Council, the Secretary-General and the Middle East Quartet in accordance with frameworks to be agreed upon, in order to ensure the active and binding engagement of the interested parties in a practical process to relaunch serious, credible negotiations based on an established timetable, with the participation of the Palestinians, in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of international law, authoritative international resolutions, the agreed-upon terms of reference for a settlement, the Arab Peace Initiative and the vision put forward by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas.

In order to ensure the success and sustainability of the process, the international community must persuade the Israeli authorities to comply with United Nations resolutions, end the occupation, withdraw fully from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, bring all settlement activity to a complete and immediate halt in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), definitively abandon its annexation plans, lift the unjust blockade of the Gaza Strip and stop all other forms of collective punishment and economic strangulation of Palestine.

The process for the achievement of a peaceful settlement cannot be relaunched while such practices and violations, which are totally contrary to international legitimacy and the requirements of international law, continue.

Our commitment to peace is a strategic choice that reflects our belief in the values of truth and justice and our support for international legitimacy. That choice is matched only by our determination to support the struggle of the Palestinian people for the restoration of its legitimate rights, which do not lapse with time; the establishment of its independent and sovereign State with the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the settlement of all final-status issues, particularly that of Palestinian refugees.

As the economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continues to deteriorate, and given that the enormous challenges posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic have exacerbated the suffering of the Palestinian people, we hope that international efforts will be combined to help the Palestinians to counter the pandemic's effects, in accordance with resolution 2532 (2020), which was unanimously adopted at the start of July 2020 at the initiative of Tunisia and France.

Tunisia reiterates its support for the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in alleviating the suffering of

refugees in its various areas of operation until a just solution to the issue is found. My country calls on regional and international actors to continue to provide assistance and enhance the humanitarian response in order to ensure the continuity of the vital services provided by the Agency.

I reiterate the commitment of Tunisia to supporting all efforts to resume progress towards a peaceful settlement in the Middle East on the basis of United Nations resolutions and the internationally agreed-upon terms of reference.

Today we have a historic responsibility to renew our support for the values of truth and justice and to strengthen the faith of the Palestinian and Arab peoples in international legitimacy and in the Council to maintain international peace and security, restore stability in the region, lift it out of the crucible of violence and tension in which it has languished for decades and bring to an end a long-standing human injustice that has had repercussions for generations of Palestinians.

Let us make the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of our Organization a historic occasion on which we work together to build a United Nations that is more unified, demonstrates more solidarity and is more responsive to challenges. Let us also use the occasion to strengthen faith in the multilateral system, build a better future for all our peoples, without exception, and reaffirm the values of impartiality, freedom and self-determination enshrined in the San Francisco Charter.

Annex 10**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Dai Bing**

[Original: Chinese]

China welcomes His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ali Nafti, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, to preside over this meeting. We thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit for their briefings. Today is the first time that Special Coordinator Wennesland participates in a meeting of the Security Council. We extend a special welcome to him as he takes up that important mandate.

This is the first time that the Security Council is considering the question of Palestine in 2021, but it is the seventy-fourth year that the Palestinian issue has been on the United Nations agenda. As we have said many times, what is lacking with regard to the Palestinian issue is not ambitious plans but the courage to deliver on promises and the integrity to uphold justice. The long-cherished aspirations and legitimate demands of the Palestinian people for an independent State cannot be delayed indefinitely. New changes are on the horizon in the current international context and the situation in the Middle East. The international community should take this opportunity to launch new efforts for peace with a greater sense of urgency, push for renewed progress in the Middle East peace process and start afresh.

First, we must mobilize diplomatic efforts and form synergies to advance the peace process. Palestine and Israel are long-standing neighbours. They should rebuild mutual trust and find a way to live next to each other and coexist peacefully.

The international community should increase cooperation, establish a multilateral mechanism to promote peace with broad participation and form a strong synergy in favour of peace and to foster dialogue. The relevant parties with significant influence on the Palestinian issue should maintain an objective and impartial position. They should act based on the fundamental interests of the Palestinian people and the countries of the region and make efforts to advance the Middle East peace process. China supports the Arab countries' just position on the Palestinian issue and appreciates and supports the important role played by the League of Arab States and other regional organizations. President Abbas proposed holding an international conference on peace in the Middle East this year. That important initiative deserves the international community's positive consideration.

As the Security Council bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, it is duty-bound to seek to resolve the Palestinian question. Under the current circumstances, the Council should listen to the voices of Palestine and the countries of the region, as well as regional organizations, and actively promote the early resumption of dialogue between Palestine and Israel on an equal footing in order to overcome differences and factors of conflict.

China will actively participate in and strongly support all efforts that are conducive to the political settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue. As a permanent member of the Security Council, China will continue to push for a greater role by the Council in the Middle East peace process.

We have taken note of Palestine's announcement that it will hold a general election this year. China welcomes that announcement and sincerely hopes that the election will be held smoothly so as to enhance intra-Palestinian reconciliation and more effectively safeguard and promote the interests of the Palestinian people.

Secondly, we must abide by the international consensus and stop acts that undermine mutual trust. The relevant United Nations resolutions on the Middle East issue, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution are the correct way forward, which has been borne out by history. They are the basic tenets for resolving the Palestinian issue and should continue to be implemented.

The settlements issue is one of the core aspects of final-status negotiations on the question of Palestine and is related to the prospects for the realization of the two-State solution. Resolution 2334 (2016) clearly states that settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory violates international law. In the past two weeks, more than 800 settlement housing construction plans were approved and tenders for more than 2,600 units were initiated. China is deeply concerned about the continued advancement and significant expansion of Israeli settlement activities and calls for the cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied territories.

The parties concerned should resolve the issue of the occupied Palestinian territories in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and delineate the final border between Palestine and Israel through peaceful negotiations. We call on the parties concerned to adhere to the strategic choice of peace talks, cherish the results of the existing dialogue and refrain from taking actions that would escalate tensions. Israel should stop demolishing Palestinian houses and destroying Palestinian property, prevent violence against civilians and lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip as soon as possible. At the same time, Israel's right to exist and its reasonable security concerns should also be fully respected and guaranteed.

Thirdly, we must adhere to a people-centred approach and improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine. The difficulties faced by the Palestinian people for survival and development cannot be ignored. Under the current situation, we must pay particular attention to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on Palestine, including promoting the fair distribution of vaccines and helping the Palestinian people to combat the pandemic. China appreciates the fact that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides education and medical services to Palestinian refugees and contributes to improving the humanitarian situation in Palestine. The international community should continue to increase political and financial support to UNRWA.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has sent a team of medical experts to help Palestine in the fight against the pandemic, provided four batches of anti-epidemic material assistance to Palestine and anti-epidemic supplies to UNRWA's health facilities and delivered health kits to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria through UNRWA.

China is a sincere friend of the Palestinian people and has always been concerned about the Middle East peace process. In December last year, President Xi Jinping sent a message to the General Assembly on the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People for the eighth consecutive year, emphasizing China's firm support for the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and for efforts towards the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue. China is ready to continue to work with the international community in its unwavering effort to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question as soon as possible and contribute positively to peace, stability and development in the Middle East.

Annex 11**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

I welcome the presence of several ministers among us, and I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing. France welcomes his appointment as Special Coordinator and assures him of its full support.

France, like the European Union, has consistently upheld its commitment to international law and to the agreed parameters for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have done that in the name of the multilateral system that we have built together and whose preservation cannot go hand in hand with a selective reading of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council itself, but also because those resolutions set out the only realistic solution to date to put an end to the oldest conflict on the Council's agenda.

The two-State solution was established with the aim of bringing about a just and lasting peace in the region. It is the only way to ensure Israel's security, on which France will never compromise, and to respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinians. The parameters for the resolution of the conflict 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. It is up to the parties, and the parties alone, to resume talks on that basis and to jointly make the changes they deem necessary for peace in order to resolve all final-status issues.

France is concerned about the increasing number of Israeli activities on the ground. Those decisions threaten the two-State solution. France condemns Israel's recent decisions to advance and approve thousands of housing units in the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including in areas that are particularly sensitive for the viability of a future Palestinian State, such as Givat Hamatos and Har Homa. We reiterate our call on the Israeli authorities not to implement those decisions. We are very concerned about the increase in demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian structures, including those financed by France and the European Union.

France and its European partners will not recognize any changes to the 1967 lines other than those agreed between the parties. We recall the obligation for all States to distinguish in their exchanges between the territory of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. That distinction must particularly be reflected in bilateral agreements and in all trade — for example, through the differentiated labelling of products from the West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements.

At this critical juncture, it is urgent to create the conditions for a resumption of direct negotiations between the parties. That is what France is striving for, together with its German, Egyptian and Jordanian partners, in the context of the positive dynamic created by the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab countries. In Cairo on 11 January, our Ministers reiterated their readiness to support the step-by-step approach necessary to create a climate of trust between Palestinians and Israelis.

The announcement by the Palestinian Authority of the resumption of its cooperation with Israel is a step in the right direction. Increased cooperation will be needed to respond to the coronavirus disease pandemic. France reminds Israel of its responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions as an occupying Power, particularly with regard to vaccines.

France and its partners will work with all actors to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on international law. We welcome the commitment to the two-State solution recently expressed by the new United States Administration and its rejection of any unilateral action that would undermine it.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to play an essential role in the pursuit of a lasting peace. France calls on all Member States to contribute to its budget, which is in a critical state.

Finally, the cohesion of Palestinian governance is an essential element in achieving this peace. France welcomed the adoption by President Abbas of the decree providing for the holding of legislative and presidential elections, followed by elections to the Palestinian National Council beginning in May. That decision must now be translated into action so that elections can be held throughout the Palestinian territories. France calls on all Palestinian political stakeholders to take constructive action to enable the Palestinian people to appoint their representatives. It calls on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections throughout the Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem. Alongside its European partners, France stands ready to support the preparation and organization of free and impartial elections within the set deadlines.

It is more urgent than ever for the international community to preserve the two-State solution. France appeals to the responsibility of everyone and will spare no effort to ensure that a new dynamic is set in motion.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations**

At the outset, I welcome all the foreign ministers to this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Let me congratulate and extend a warm welcome to the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I also acknowledge the presence of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and thank him for his briefing.

It is heartening to see positive developments with regard to the Israel-Palestine issue. India welcomes the announcement of the convening of legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections later this year in Palestine and urges all parties to take necessary further steps to ensure that those elections are held smoothly, fulfilling the democratic aspirations of the Palestinian people.

We acknowledge and appreciate the efforts, inter alia, of Egypt in the process of rapprochement between the Palestinian parties, thereby bringing them together to end the internal divide. The resumption of civil and security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has also begun to alleviate the situation on the ground in Palestinian territories.

The normalization of relations between Israel and some States members of the League of Arab States is also an important development, which has the potential to promote regional cooperation for peace, security and prosperity. Further, that can provide the necessary momentum for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

India has always called for a just and comprehensive solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and has welcomed all peaceful efforts to achieve a two-State solution through direct negotiations between the two parties. In that context, India reiterates its support for President Abbas' call to hold an international peace conference with the participation of all relevant parties to achieve the vision of a sovereign and independent Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

We support the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator to resume the peace process, including by revitalizing the Quartet, and help mediate the peace negotiations. We also take note of the joint efforts by Egypt, Jordan, France and Germany aimed at strengthening the collective commitment on the part of the international community to facilitate the peace process.

India has made a multi-year enhanced annual financial contribution of \$5 million to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing humanitarian assistance and essential services. As an incoming member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, India will continue to strengthen its contribution to the Agency.

On the development aspect of our engagement with Palestine, India has been consistently supporting Palestinian nation-building efforts through human resource development and institution-building. We are currently undertaking several projects in many sectors, including health, education and technology, of around \$72 million. We also provide over 250 scholarships for Palestinian youth and officials on an annual basis. India has also supplied critical life-saving drugs and medical equipment to Palestine as assistance during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

On the broader regional developments, India welcomes the signing of the Al-Ula Declaration, which has ushered in rapprochement and reconciliation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. We acknowledge the key role of a unified GCC in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

The commencement of talks between Israel and Lebanon last year was a significant development. India looks forward to the swift formation of the Government in Lebanon that can offer political stability and also tackle the grave socioeconomic challenges being faced by the people of Lebanon. India will continue to stand by Lebanon during its time of need.

India has committed itself and contributed to the efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to the region through the deployment of our personnel as part of United Nations peacekeeping forces, including in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, through substantial and timely humanitarian assistance and through development cooperation and capacity-building. India proposes to supply vaccines to the region to help the countries fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, India reaffirms its commitment to a just solution to the Palestinian issue and stands ready to continue its engagement with the region, with an abiding faith in realizing the vision of sustained peace and stability in the Middle East.

Annex 13**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

I join others in congratulating Mr. Tor Wennesland on his appointment as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. He can count on Kenya's constructive engagement throughout his time and in his efforts. I also thank him and Secretary-General Aboul Gheit for the informative briefing on the current developments in the region and in particular the position of League of Arab States.

Kenya condemns all violations, by all parties, that endanger the peace and prosperity of the people in the Middle East region.

We are concerned by the persistent acts of violence and clashes between Palestinian and Israeli security forces and settler-related violence. It is our hope that the cessation of hostilities by both parties, and the Israeli Government's commitment to policies, legislation and actions geared towards immediate cessation of settlement activities will pave the way for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

We reiterate our strong condemnation of any use of terrorism to further a political agenda no matter how urgent that agenda may appear.

The practicality and full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) needs to address not only the issue of settlements, territorial contiguity and the viability of the two-State solution, but also factor in the socioeconomic implications of settlements. All those elements have implications on the sustainability of peace and security in the region.

Like the rest of the world, the Israelis and Palestinians are experiencing the dire impact of the pandemic on households and on other income-generating activities. That new threat is compounding the already existing challenges in the region.

In that regard, measures that have the potential of acting as bottlenecks to equitable economic recovery and domestic, regional and international investments need to be reviewed to mitigate against the suffering of the most vulnerable.

We call for reinforced cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities in the area of delivery of critical supplies, including food and medicine, and the movement of health and other essential workers in and out of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Concurrently, the international community should remain seized on the urgency to support national and regional efforts geared towards the resumption of meaningful negotiations to achieve a comprehensive peace based on the vision of two-States in line with the pre-1967 borders.

It is our hope that all parties will come on board, including through participation in the proposed international conference and in alignment with the agreed normative frameworks, road maps, the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions pertaining to Israel and the question of Palestine.

I join others in welcoming the presence of His Excellency Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine. The presidential decree of 15 January on election dates is an important step in strengthening the Government structure and fostering political legitimacy, democratic space and national ownership for all the Palestinian people.

Kenya also welcomes the normalization of relations between Israel and countries in the Arab world as an important step towards lasting peace in the Middle East. The normalization of relations between the Israelis and Palestinians as two viable States living side by side, within secure and recognized borders, should also be a priority.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

At the outset, I would like to wish Mr. Tor Wennesland every success in his new position, which he is beginning with the detailed briefing he has just given us on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to assure him of my country's full support in carrying out his mission to achieve a fair and equitable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To his predecessor, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, I would like to express our gratitude for the dynamism and efficiency he has shown in fulfilling his mission.

The Niger wholeheartedly welcomed the announcement made by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on 15 January that legislative and presidential elections would be held in May and July. My country welcomes the announcement of those elections, which will enable Palestinians, including those living in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, to renew the legitimacy of their institutions. The compromise reached by Hamas and Fatah reflects the Palestinian people's desire for reconciliation and unity.

We hope that the upcoming elections in both Palestine and Israel, which are a crucial step, can contribute to improving relations between the two countries and to creating conditions for the resumption of political negotiations, with a view to achieving the two-State solution.

It goes without saying that the elections in Palestine will need the full support of the international community if they are to be the success we are hoping for.

While there are signs of an easing in relations between Israel and some countries of the region, the situation in Palestine continues to deteriorate. In that regard, the Niger deplores the continued construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. That worrying trend, which we have continuously condemned, resulted early this year in the approval of plans for the construction of some 800 new housing units in the West Bank, as well as requests for tenders for the construction of 2,500 others, including 460 in East Jerusalem.

We equally deplore the policy of demolition of Palestinian properties by Israel, the occupying Power, as well as the forced displacement, expulsion and transfer of Palestinian civilians, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Those practices, as well as the modification of the historical and legal status of the occupied city of Jerusalem, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, are acts that endanger the viability of the two-State solution and the return to the pre-1967 borders. As such, they cannot be tolerated.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its concern about the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as a result of the coronavirus disease pandemic, which has been aggravated by the fragility of the health system, extreme poverty and food insecurity, among other things. The Gaza blockade, which has lasted for 13 years, as well as the drastic reduction of funding to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, endanger the lives of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women and children. It is high time to respond to President Mahmoud Abbas' request for the organization of an international peace conference involving all the parties concerned, including the Quartet, in order to take advantage of the new prospects for the only viable solution — that of creating a viable Palestinian State within its 1967 borders, living side by side and in peace with Israel.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, Barbara Woodward**

As others have done, I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and welcome him to this new role. I also thank the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for joining us today and for his briefing.

Let me start by welcoming President Abbas's announcement of dates for legislative and presidential elections in the occupied Palestinian territories for the first time since 2006. We encourage the Palestinian leadership to work towards strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. Free and fair elections are an important and necessary step.

Turning to the conflict, I should first reiterate the United Kingdom's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 lines with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. The United Kingdom supports existing Security Council resolutions as a basis for this settlement, including resolution 2334 (2016).

With our commitment to the two-State solution in mind, we condemn the Government of Israel's decision on 20 January to award tenders, and therefore proceed towards the construction of settlement units in the prospective 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 decision undermines the potential for future peace talks. The United Kingdom has also expressed concern at the additional 3,900 settlement units that have been advanced across the West Bank throughout January. We again urge Israel to immediately cease settlement expansion in the West Bank. And we remain concerned by the demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes.

We condemn the murder of Esther Horgan, which occurred in a suspected terror attack by a Palestinian suspect on 20 December in Tal Menashe. The United Kingdom is clear about our condemnation of all acts of terrorism, as they gravely undermine the prospects for peace. Equally, we condemn all violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians.

This month also saw the firing of rockets on 17 January from militant groups in Gaza. The United Kingdom condemns the firing of rockets at civilian populations. Any attacks targeting civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. The United Kingdom continues to 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 continue to urge the parties to prioritize progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza, and we encourage Israel to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

As we have consistently done, we join the United States and other Council members today in rejecting unilateral action on both sides.

The United Kingdom has been a strong supporter of recent Arab-Israeli normalization agreements. Normalization changes the regional context and presents

opportunities for moving ahead with material benefits and new partnerships, to help deliver long overdue Israeli-Palestinian peace.

A two-State solution is the only viable long-term solution. It is the only way to permanently end the Arab-Israeli conflict, deliver Palestinian self-determination and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity.

We echo the incoming United States Administration's hope that the process will unlock options for advancing a two-State solution. We look forward to working with the new Administration, alongside regional partners and the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, to seize this positive momentum, helping deliver greater regional prosperity and security and making progress on a solution to the conflict. We continue to support that goal.

Annex 16**Statement by the Acting Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Richard Mills**

Let me at the outset join others in taking a moment to wish Foreign Minister Jerandi, who was supposed to join us on screen today, a swift, full recovery from the coronavirus disease.

I also want to take a moment to welcome Mr. Tor Wennesland, the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. It is a complicated file he has taken over, but his broad experience — not only on the Middle East peace issues, but also on the wider region — means that he has a depth of understanding that the United States hopes will help bring about a peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict. I know that we have expressed our thanks before, but I would like to take just one more moment to express the gratitude and appreciation of the United States Government for the work and professionalism of Nickolay Mladenov, Tor's predecessor.

As this is the first time that the United States is addressing the Security Council on this issue since President Biden was inaugurated, and in the light of some of the comments that have been made earlier by colleagues and our briefers, I thought it useful to share with the Council some of the contours of the United States approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict under President Biden.

Under the new Administration, the policy of the United States will be to support a mutually agreed two-State solution, one in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian State. This vision, as I know we have just heard, although under serious stress, remains the best way to ensure Israel's future as a democratic and Jewish State, while upholding the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for a State of their own and to live with dignity and security. Peace cannot be imposed on either the Israelis or the Palestinians.

United States diplomatic engagement will begin from the premise that sustainable progress must be based on active consultation with both sides and that ultimate success requires the active consent of each. Unfortunately, as I think we have heard, the respective leaderships are far apart on final-status issues, Israeli and Palestinian politics are fraught, and trust between the two sides is at a nadir. However, these realities do not relieve States Members of the United Nations of the responsibility of trying to preserve the viability of a two-State solution. Neither should these realities distract from the imperative of improving conditions on the ground, particularly the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In this vein, the United States will urge Israel's Government and the Palestinian Authority to avoid unilateral steps that make a two-State solution more difficult, such as annexation of territory, settlement activity, demolitions, incitement to violence or providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism. We hope it will be possible to start working to slowly build confidence on both sides to create an environment in which we might once again be able to help make progress on a solution.

In order to advance these objectives, the Biden Administration will restore credible United States engagement with Palestinians as well as with Israelis. This will involve renewing United States relations with the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people, which are relations that have atrophied over the last four years. President Biden has been clear in his intent to restore United States assistance programmes that support economic development and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people and to take steps to reopen diplomatic missions that were closed

by the previous United States Administration. We do not view these steps as a favour to the Palestinian leadership. United States assistance benefits millions of ordinary Palestinians and helps to preserve a stable environment that benefits both Palestinians and Israelis.

At the same time, I must be clear: the United States will maintain its steadfast support for Israel. Under the Biden Administration, the United States will continue its long-standing policy of opposing one-sided resolutions and other actions in international bodies that unfairly single out Israel. The United States will also work to promote Israel's standing and participation in United Nations bodies and other international organizations. We hope to be able to cooperate with Member States on these issues.

On a final note, I also want to make clear that the Biden Administration welcomes the recent normalization agreements between Israel and United Nations Member States in the Arab world, as well as Muslim-majority countries. I was very pleased to hear those agreements praised by others speaking before me. I think that reflects everyone's understanding that peaceful cooperation among Member States in the Middle East is an important contribution to regional stability.

The United States will continue to urge other countries to normalize relations with Israel, and we will look for other opportunities to expand cooperation between erstwhile adversaries. Yet we recognize that Arab-Israeli normalization is not a substitute for Israeli-Palestinian peace. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians may not be the major fault line in the Middle East, but its resolution would nevertheless significantly benefit the region as a whole. It is the hope of the United States that normalization can proceed in a way that unlocks new possibilities to advance a two-State solution.

In conclusion, let me add a comment on the mention of the Quartet by previous speakers: the United States looks forward to working with Israel, the Palestinians, Security Council members, the Quartet and the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process over the next several years.

Annex 17**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Hai Anh Pham**

I would like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his first briefing and wish him great success in his new role as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Viet Nam affirms its full support for him in this role.

I welcome His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Palestine, and Ambassador Gilad Erdan, Permanent Representative of Israel, to this meeting.

Viet Nam welcomes the Palestinian Authority's recent announcement of the parliamentary and presidential elections to be held later this year. These long-awaited elections will be a crucial step in strengthening Palestinian solidarity and helping the Palestinians overcome multiple challenges and achieve progress in the peace process. Viet Nam believes that successful elections will contribute to stability in the region and the achievement of a just, long-standing and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine. In that regard, Viet Nam calls upon the United Nations and all relevant parties to support Palestinian efforts aimed at holding free and fair elections with the participation of all eligible voters from all parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

The Middle East peace process has been delayed for a long time, and the situation is far from improving. In the past few years, violence never ceased to cause casualties to civilians, many of whom were children and women. We condemn all attacks against civilians. The humanitarian conditions have showed little sign of improvement. Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), has continued to be violated. The Palestinians are increasingly losing their confidence in the possibility of a long-lasting and just solution.

Viet Nam support all initiatives and steps by all relevant parties that may help reverse those negative trends. There are hopes for new dynamics to revive the peace process. We call upon the Quartet to take a reinvigorated and active role in this process. We also encourage countries and organizations of the region, including the League of Arab States, to make sustained efforts to contribute to the peace process. Hopes for the Palestinian people need to be built upon concrete actions by all concerned.

At the same time, we continue to express our concern about the recent expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including the announcement by the Israeli Government earlier this month of the plan to build 800 settlement units and others, as the Special Coordinator has reported. These activities constitute a serious violation of resolution 2334 (2016) and other related resolutions, undermine the hopes for a two-State solution and make the contiguity of a future Palestinian State practically impossible. We join other States Members of the United Nations in calling on Israel to immediately cease all of its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

The challenges in the peace process are further compounded by humanitarian ones. The international community must continue its efforts aimed at helping to address the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories. Viet Nam reiterates its call for the continued provision of much-needed humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees. We acknowledge the importance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), along with other United Nations agencies and

international organizations, in alleviating the plight of the Palestinians and call for stronger support for UNRWA to ensure the continuity of its vital programmes and its contribution to regional stability. In the light of the ongoing financial shortfalls, we urge the international community to provide UNRWA with the funding necessary to ensure the continuity of the Agency's indispensable operations.

In conclusion, Viet Nam reaffirms its solidarity and consistent support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, as well as for the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine that coexists in peace with the State of Israel along the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 18**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, Riad Al-Malki**

Allow me at the outset to congratulate Tunisia on its skilled presidency of the Security Council and to express our appreciation for the convening of today's high-level open debate, as well as to wish my brother Othman Jerandi a swift recovery. I also wish the President of Mexico a swift recovery. May this year witness an end to this terrible pandemic. Let me note in this regard that the occupying Power has not provided any vaccine to the Palestinian people under occupation to this day, insisting it is under no obligation to do so.

Allow me also to thank Foreign Minister Lavrov for his participation and take this opportunity to thank Russia for its leading role in the Quartet in the most difficult of circumstances, and President Putin for his repeated efforts to bring the parties together, as well as the Foreign Ministers of Ireland, Mexico and Norway, colleagues with whom I have worked closely to advance peace, and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Estonia, for participating in this meeting.

I also congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland for assuming his functions as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We look forward to working with him in his new capacity to advance a just peace. I also welcome my brother Mr. Aboul Gheit, who remains a tireless advocate of peace.

I also wish to express our appreciation to the States that recently concluded their Security Council terms, namely, Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa, thanking them for their commitment to international law and peace and for their support for the rights of the Palestinian people. I would also express our congratulations to India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway and wish them every success as they undertake their new terms on the Council.

The countdown for the demise of the two-State solution is under way. Some say the time has already elapsed. It is our collective responsibility to salvage the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders before it is too late. Some wonder if this is the right time for peace. But the very reasons that demonstrate how difficult achieving peace is going to be, including the situation on the ground, the mistrust and the illegal unilateral actions, should prompt more, not less, international involvement, especially since we all agree we are running out of time.

How much trust was there when the parties to the conflict met in Madrid 30 years ago? How ready were they to negotiate? How willing was the Prime Minister of Israel at that time, Mr. Yitzhak Shamir, to make peace? How pleased were the Palestinians that the Palestine Liberation Organization could not even send its own delegation? What did the situation on the ground look like?

The world decided it was time to solve the conflict, and it was not going to take "no" for an answer. I can tell Council members with certainty that, without Madrid, we would not have made it to Oslo. The momentum for peace is something we create, not something we wait for, and I know there is no lack of willingness around this table and beyond to see peace prevail.

We therefore reiterate our call for a collective approach mobilizing the international community and demonstrating its resolve to achieve peace. In that context, we call for the revival of the Quartet and its engagement with partners and the parties, as well as for the continued mobilization of the Security Council. We also reiterate our call for the convening of an international peace conference that can signal a turning point in this conflict, as the Madrid Conference did three decades ago, and to launch final-status negotiations based on the international terms

of reference and parameters. Our call for multilateral engagement is not an attempt to evade bilateral negotiations but, rather, an effort to ensure their success.

Does anyone here believe that Israel has really dropped its annexation plans? Or is the reality actually that it is finalizing those plans on the ground as we speak, advancing more than 3,000 new settlement units in the last few weeks alone, accelerating the demolition of Palestinian homes and the displacement of our people, with settler violence reaching an all-time high and with repeated provocations at holy sites, especially Al-Haram Al-Sharif?

Israel's goal has always been the same: grabbing maximum Palestinian geography with minimum Palestinian demography. The outcome of that policy is known: millions of Palestinians enduring oppression, discrimination and blatant segregation, denied their most basic rights and deprived of control over their land, their resources, their borders and their lives. Who would accept that? We cannot. Would any of those you? The question therefore remains how to convince Israel to choose peace, not annexation, or, in the words of former United States President Jimmy Carter, peace, not apartheid.

In 2016, the Quartet stressed the urgent need for affirmative steps to reverse negative trends on the ground in order to “prevent the entrenchment of a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict that is incompatible with realizing the national aspirations” (*S/2016/595, annex, p. 2*) of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. In response to the rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), a road map to salvaging the two-State solution and achieving peace.

In his speech explaining why the United States did not resort to the veto, Secretary Kerry explained that the two-State solution was not only a Palestinian interest, an Israeli interest, a regional and international interest, but also a United States interest. He stressed that the “critical decision about the future — one State or two States — is effectively being made on the ground every single day”, noting that “the status quo is leading towards one state and perpetual occupation, but most of the public either ignores it or has given up hope that anything can be done to change it”, adding that “with this passive resignation, the problem only gets worse, the risks get greater, and the choices are narrowed”.

This lucid assessment about the urgency to act to salvage the two-State solution was followed by four years during which the Trump Administration used the United States' might and influence to support Israel's unlawful efforts to entrench its occupation and control, breaking with decades of United States diplomacy. Even the most vulnerable, millions of Palestine refugees, were not spared as the Trump Administration withdrew United States funding from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), seeking to bring the Agency to collapse in spite of the international consensus on its indispensable role pending a just solution. What if these considerable resources were used to advance freedom, justice and peace, not annexation and apartheid?

The last four years have tested our collective resolve, and the international consensus has endured and prevailed. The members of the Council, the Quartet, the Munich Group and the international community as a whole stood up against annexation, reaffirmed their support for Palestinian rights, supported UNRWA and continued working for a just and lasting peace. Now is the time to heal and repair the damage left by the previous United States Administration.

President Abbas has congratulated President Biden on his election and expressed our hope for the resumption of relations and positive engagement. We look forward to the reversal of the unlawful and hostile measures undertaken by the

Trump Administration and to working together for peace. We welcome the decision of the new Administration to rejoin the rules-based international order and hope that the United States will play an important role in multilateral efforts for peace in the Middle East.

This is not a time for passive resignation but a time for resolute action. Without such action, neither reversing negative trends on the ground, first and foremost illegal settlement activities, nor resuming meaningful final-status negotiations will be possible. The deterioration of the situation on the ground is directly linked to the attempts of one party to prejudge and dictate the outcome of negotiations, implementing annexation that would destroy any prospect for a sovereign and contiguous State of Palestine while pretending to accept a two-State solution.

There are those who ask: what can be done that has not been tried already? But did the world truly use the toolbox available to it to end this occupation and conflict?

How does the world deal with other conflicts? Does it say that the parties shall negotiate and just wait for them to be ready and agree? Or does it find the necessary resources to push parties towards negotiations and away from unlawful unilateral actions, including by upholding third parties' obligations? Does it only condemn violations, or make sure that their cost far outweighs their benefits by creating incentives for compliance with obligations and disincentives for their breach? Does the Council, in adopting its resolutions, accompany them with the means to ensure their implementation as per its Charter duties, or does it offer its resolutions as mere advice for the parties to decide if they take it or not?

Since both parties say that they are committed to peace, why not allow the deployment of international observers truly empowered to assess compliance? Why fear consequences for whomever breaches their legal obligations? Why not conduct final-status negotiations under international auspices? Why reject the idea of binding time frames? That is the path towards changing the dramatic reality that is under way in Palestine. We stand ready to do our part and will continue fulfilling our obligations.

An entire nation is yearning for freedom, and its calls must be answered. We do not ask for anything more than what the Charter of the United Nations prescribed for all peoples, and neither will we accept anything less. We cannot accept a future of walls and blockades, humiliation and subjugation. We will spare no effort in advancing an independent, sovereign, viable, contiguous and democratic State of Palestine on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will do so by resorting to peaceful means alone, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

While we pursue our long journey to freedom and peace, we call for immediate protection for our people, who are equally entitled to security, until such time when we can ensure their protection as a sovereign State.

President Abbas has issued a decree calling for Palestinian legislative and presidential elections, as well as elections for the Palestinian National Council. That is an integral part of the efforts to resume our democratic life and to achieve national reconciliation and unity. We thank all those who are supporting these efforts and ask for international support and assistance to ensure the integrity of the elections, including by helping to avert and remove any Israeli obstacles to their conduct, notably in East Jerusalem, as well as respect for the outcome.

In this period of electoral campaigns, there are those who, in trying to secure votes, remain committed to international law, the two-State solution and peaceful means, and those who instead announce settlements, advance annexation and persist in their provocations. May people not be duped by the ills of demagoguery, supremacy

and domination and rather choose the path of equal rights, mutual respect and shared dignity. With your help, may our future be one of freedom, security and prosperity for all — a future of peace, not apartheid.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan**

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Security Council members and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, and wish them luck in their respective positions. It is my hope that their arrival will help rid the Council of its old habits and bias against Israel and instead focus on the real threat to peace and security: the tyrannical regime in Tehran.

Tomorrow, here at the United Nations and around the world, we will mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day and mourn the unfathomable murder of 6 million Jews. Indeed, 76 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, where three of my grandparents and millions of others endured the worst hell on earth, there is another genocidal regime epitomizing the very words and actions of the Nazis.

Iran does not try to hide its intention of destroying the world's only Jewish State, spreading anti-Semitism, denying the Holocaust and even proposing legislation calling for Israel's destruction by the year 2041. How is it possible that the Iranian Parliament proposing to annihilate a Member State is not at the top of the Council's agenda? Especially on the eve of such an important day, when we commemorate the Holocaust and no doubt you will all pledge "never again"? Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel astutely said, "I learned to trust the threats of enemies before the promises of friends". I hope that you will disprove Wiesel's warning.

Iran should be the focus of the remarks of the members of the Security Council today, for there is no greater force endangering and destabilizing the Middle East, and there is no bigger threat to peace and security around the world. The regime does not stop at threatening Israel. It has spent the time since signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) developing its nuclear capabilities and deepening its knowledge in a way that makes clear it has not abandoned its intention of becoming a nuclear Power.

As a recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency indicates, Iran continues with its clandestine activities, including nuclear-contaminated sites, and lately even creating the infrastructure needed for producing uranium metal, a sensitive material that could be used in a nuclear warhead. These are just the latest in a long list of violations that leave no doubt of Iran's intentions. We cannot allow the most dangerous regime in the world to possess the most dangerous weapon of all.

And yet this will not be the focus of the debate on the Middle East by an institution entrusted with promoting peace and security. Absurd.

I would like to be clear: Israel has no grievances with the Iranian people. They, too, are victims of the regime's extremist ideology. President Rouhani and Minister Zarif are responsible for thousands of executions and grave violations of the human rights of their own citizens. Indeed, it is impossible for anyone to remain unmoved by the brutal murder of Rouhollah Zam.

Rouhollah was a 47-year-old husband, father of two and journalist. He was forced to flee his home after expressing opposition to the Iranian regime. Rouhollah continued to share the truth about Iran from France, where he lived as a refugee. He was lured back to the Middle East, where he was abducted. Pictures later released by Iran's Revolutionary Guard showed him blindfolded. Back in Iran, he faced a sham trial and was found guilty of the nonsensical crime "corruption on Earth." He was, as expected, sentenced to death. Despite a global campaign, Rouhollah was executed, and, in the face of criticism, President Rouhani defended that barbaric murder as "lawful."

Thousands of Iranians are paying the price for the international community's complacency when it comes to the regime's grave violations of human rights and its inhumane behaviour. The way in which Ayatollah regime operates is reminiscent of the darkest period in history. We should all remember this tomorrow when we commemorate the Holocaust.

The reality in 2021 is not the reality of 2015. What we all know today about Iran is not what the international community knew when it signed the nuclear deal with Iran. Now we know that, contrary to the signatories' premise, Iran did not use the removal of sanctions to improve the lives of its citizens but instead doubled down on its malign activities. Rather than using the dividends of the nuclear agreement to build schools and hospitals, it built an arsenal of missiles. Rather than using its resources to fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), it wasted them on funding terrorist proxies and undermining peace and security.

Iran has a long history of lying to the international community. It must not be trusted. As the secret Iranian archive that Israel revealed proves, Iran lied to the international community when it signed the agreement. It failed to disclose its massive nuclear-weapons programme, trying to keep it hidden so that it could be used once the deal's "sunset" provisions have expired.

Iran deceived the world when it signed the agreement, and it continues to deceive the world today. The regime believes that its recent violations and rogue behaviour will force the international community to lift the sanctions and return to the JCPOA. The Council must not give in to this nuclear extortion and must not remove sanctions.

As the regime's behaviour proves, the sanctions have taken a toll on the Iranian economy. That must be leveraged to ensure that Iran has a reason to change its destructive behaviour and abandon its nuclear ambitions. Prior to the deal, we all saw that Iran agreed to come to the negotiating table only when it faced the essential combination of crippling sanctions and a credible military threat.

Returning to the JCPOA and giving up that leverage, even if intended to lay the groundwork for a future agreement, would be a mistake. It will rule out any possibility of a long-term settlement that has real, effective enforcement mechanisms and that will secure peace in the region.

We appreciate the commitment of the international community to blocking Iran's pathway to nuclear weapons, but we believe that once sanctions have been lifted and Iran's economy begins to improve, it will have no reason to negotiate. Once back in the JCPOA, all Iran has to do is wait for the restrictions to expire automatically in less than a decade.

It is undisputable that the JCPOA does not prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capabilities. It merely delays it by a few years. Unfortunately, it gives international legitimacy to a tyrannical, genocidal, rogue regime to become a nuclear Power once it expires. The striking speed and efficiency with which the regime manages to restore its uranium production capabilities is clear proof of the deal's flaws.

Again, the Security Council must not allow the world's most dangerous regime to possess the world's most dangerous weapon. Israel knows how to protect its citizens, and we will never allow Iran to become a nuclear Power or become a nuclear threshold country. In that regard, we appreciate President Biden and his Administration's commitment to assuring that that will never happen. We will work together to achieve that important goal.

As new Member States enter the Security Council, I hope that the approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will change. I suggest that the Council

discuss the real obstacles to peace: Palestinian incitement and a culture of hate. For years, Palestinian incitement against Israel has prevented any possibility of reconciliation, and that has brought terrible consequences. Even in 2020, as we all fought the pandemic, there were hundreds of attempted Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israelis. Just a few weeks ago, an Israeli woman, Esther Horgan, a mother of six, was brutally murdered when she went out for a run.

Time and again, Israel has expressed its willingness to negotiate and find a viable solution to the conflict. We are a people dedicated to peace. We pray for peace. We educate our children on the importance of peace. Israel has repeatedly demonstrated that it will make peace when there is a willing partner. That was true decades ago when we made peace with Egypt and Jordan and it is true today as we expand the number of peace agreements.

The Security Council must encourage the Palestinians to join the circle of peace as well. The only way to achieve peace is through direct bilateral negotiations without preconditions. If President Abbas were truly serious about peace, he would stop inciting violence. He would not be doing his utmost to find new ways to continue his pay-to-slay policy, including by trying to establish a new bank to transfer funds to terrorists. He would come to the negotiating table without making outrageous demands and would not call for another pointless international conference. Any call for such a conference is just a distraction. It is just another form of Palestinian rejectionism. Abbas has suddenly remembered that he cares about democratic values. After 15 years of avoiding elections, it is no coincidence that he chose to announce his intention to hold elections as the new Administration entered office.

The Middle East of today is not the same Middle East as before. It is no longer held hostage by the Palestinians. Thanks to the Abraham Accords, things have changed for the better. The Accords have brought incredible opportunities to all those who embraced them. Those opportunities are even greater than the economic and cultural cooperation already taking place. They bring stability and new hope for the future of the region. The Palestinians tell Member States that they want peace, so let them explain why they called the peace agreements a “betrayal” and a “stab in the back”. Let them explain why they joined Iran in opposing the agreements.

Finally, I would like to shatter the latest blood libel being spread by the Palestinians — the false and grotesque accusations about Israel’s campaign to vaccinate its people. Thanks to the winning combination of essential early steps taken by Prime Minister Netanyahu, its national health-care system and its people’s resilience and experience with emergencies, Israel is leading a successful vaccination campaign that includes all parts of Israeli society. We are also sharing what we have learned with other countries.

Israel is known for lending a helping hand whenever and wherever it can. COVID-19 is no exception. For us, human life is paramount. Over the past six months, Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided millions of dollars’ worth of aid to assist countries in their struggle against the pandemic. In addition, since the onset of the pandemic, Israel has worked closely with United Nations bodies to assist the Palestinians, training medical staff and supplying them with essential equipment. Those efforts were praised by the previous Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov.

According to international agreements, the Palestinian Authority is responsible for the health care of its own population, just as it is responsible for the education system. It informed Israel that it intends to purchase vaccines from the Russian Government, and Israel has announced that it will facilitate their transfer. Those are the facts. Anyone who joins the Palestinian campaign of lies either does not know the facts or is motivated by politics or anti-Semitism. There is a long history of using

every crisis to spread anti-Semitism and blame the Jews. I hope that, on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the members of the Council will check the facts and not allow that bigoted tradition to continue.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

Argentina understands that the only solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies in negotiations between the two parties aimed at seeking agreement on the final-status issues set out in the Oslo Accords, namely, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders and security measures.

Argentina supports a peaceful, final and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question, in line with the two-State solution and based on the 1967 borders and what the parties decide in the negotiation process, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Argentina is convinced of the important role that the United Nations can play in finding a solution to the conflict. We are therefore grateful for the tireless work of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Tor Wennesland as his successor and wish him every success.

In the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic, we would like to highlight the important contribution of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in preventing further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of the pandemic. Therefore, now more than ever, we reaffirm the need for the international community to develop appropriate responses to ensure that UNRWA has the necessary funds to be able to continue providing its services to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees.

Argentina reaffirms its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent and viable State, recognized by all nations, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Argentina also reiterates its concern over the ongoing and steady increase in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and calls for a halt to their expansion. As the General Assembly has repeatedly noted, settlements are contrary to international law, hinder peace and undermine the prospect of a solution with two States living in peace and security, thereby promoting the continuation of an unsustainable status quo. The gravity of the situation has been recognized by the Security Council in resolution 2334 (2016), whose provisions we fully endorse.

Furthermore, Argentina condemns the firing of rockets from Gaza against civilians in Israel, as well as all violent acts by Hamas and other armed groups. Palestinian leaders need to genuinely address Israel's security concerns.

With regard to the situation in East Jerusalem, Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980). In that context, we reject any unilateral attempt to alter it, in particular regarding the Old City, which has a special significance for the three great monotheistic religions. The Holy City must be a place of encounter and peace. Jews, Muslims and Christians must be guaranteed free access to the holy sites. Any attempt to deny or diminish the historical link and the profound significance of those sites to any of the three monotheistic religions is completely unacceptable and does not contribute to finding a solution to the conflict, reinforcing prejudice and mistrust between the parties. Argentina believes that Jerusalem is one of the issues whose final status should be defined by the parties in bilateral negotiations.

In relation to the Syrian Golan, Argentina maintains a principled position regarding the illegality of the acquisition of territory by force and respect for the territorial integrity of States. We firmly believe in the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes. We therefore believe it important to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict between Syria and Israel with a view to ending the occupation of the Golan Heights as soon as possible, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

Finally, Argentina would like to once again urge the Palestinians and the Israelis to resume peace talks, while acting in good faith, with flexibility and in accordance with international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, in pursuit of an agreement on the outstanding issues relating to the final status of Palestine in all its aspects.

Annex 21

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations

I have the honour to deliver this statement at the quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The question of Palestine has historically been an issue of concern and vital importance to the Non-Aligned Movement, and it is with deep regret that we witness the passing of yet another year without a resolution to that injustice. Constituting a matter of international peace and security and also being the cornerstone for peace in the Middle East region, the situation there remains critical and unsustainable, and it therefore continues to require the immediate attention of the international community.

Looking back, the figures for 2020 are appalling. In the Gaza Strip, 49 Palestinians, including 13 children and three women, were killed by the Israeli occupying forces as a result of air strikes and during demonstrations, clashes, military operations and other incidents, while 2,940 Palestinians were injured, including some 434 Palestinians by live ammunition. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 22 Palestinians were shot and killed, including one woman, and 3,802 Palestinians were injured, including 801 children. In 2020, it was documented that the Israeli occupying authorities demolished or seized 593 structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, resulting in the displacement of 687 people, including 347 children and 177 women, and affecting 18,860 others.

Reflecting on that dismal reality, the Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people as they continue to endure this tragic injustice, its unwavering support for their inalienable rights, including to self-determination, and its commitment to the alleviation of their plight and to the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects. That solution is well known and must be in line with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations itself. The tools provided by multilateral diplomacy are the way to achieve such a solution, which cannot be imposed unilaterally, forcibly or unfairly. It is high time to activate those tools in the service of justice and peace. That is the only way to bring an end to the conflict.

The Security Council has a clear responsibility to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore, it must uphold its Charter duties and act to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions, which not only constitute the foundation for a peaceful solution to the conflict but also are legally binding on all States Members of the United Nations. We are deeply concerned that this body has for too long been unable to fulfil its mandate on this important question. At this critical moment, that requires immediate action in order to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its violations. The absence of justice fosters only greater impunity and further destabilizes the situation on the ground, severely diminishing the prospects for peace.

The States members of the Non-Aligned Movement deplore the ongoing Israeli intransigence and its illegal policies and measures, which are greatly undermining the realization of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Movement reiterates its grave concern regarding the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and in particular the Gaza Strip, where the illegal and suffocating Israeli blockade has imposed a dire humanitarian situation and deplorable socioeconomic conditions, which have only worsened in this time of a global pandemic.

The Non-Aligned Movement continues to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) provides the most viable path towards peace, setting forth the essential requirements and parameters for the achievement of the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with the long-standing terms of reference for peace endorsed by the international community, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Hence, we call for its full and effective implementation.

Israel must be compelled to cease completely all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the demolition of Palestinian homes and property, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, all acts of violence, provocations and incitement against Palestinian civilians and other human rights violations, many of which may amount to war crimes.

Israel must fully comply with its duties and responsibilities under international law, including its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as the occupying Power. It must immediately cease all policies and measures aimed at the alteration of the demography, character, identity and legal status of the occupied territories. It also must respect the historic status quo at the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, including at Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The Non-Aligned Movement also reaffirms its support for Jordan in preserving and administrating the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and for the Hashemite custodianship of the holy sites, as exercised by His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of Jordan.

The Non-Aligned Movement commends the efforts of His Majesty King Mohammed VI as Chair of Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation. The Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the “Call for Al-Quds/ Jerusalem”, signed in Rabat on 30 March 2019 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco and His Holiness Pope Francis, stressing the important role of Al-Quds/ Jerusalem as a city of tolerance and mutual respect among the people of the three monotheistic religions and the need to preserve its specificities and its features as a city of peaceful coexistence.

The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The members of the Non-Aligned Movement condemn the statement made by the President of the United States of America on 21 March 2019 regarding the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the subsequent unilateral and arbitrary proclamation on “Recognizing the Golan Heights as part of Israel”, and call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by clearly condemning this provocative statement and proclamation.

In the absence of a solution, the member States of the Movement reiterate their call for the continued provision of the necessary humanitarian and socioeconomic assistance to the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees. The Movement expresses its deep appreciation for the invaluable work done and the essential assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to Palestine refugees, welcomes the extension of its mandate until 30 June 2023 and urges donors to provide the necessary funding support for UNRWA at this crucial time.

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as its unwavering support for their just cause, and renews its commitment to further strengthening and coordinating the international efforts to achieve a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Question of Palestine in all its aspects, including for the plight of the Palestine refugees based

on resolution 194 (III). We express our sincere hopes that this year will witness tangible progress in the heroic quest of the Palestinian people to attain justice and fulfil their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations, Jamal Fares Alrowaiei**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tunisia for holding today's important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I also congratulate Tor Wennesland on assuming the position of United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and wish him success in performing all his tasks. My sincere thanks go to his predecessor, Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable efforts throughout his time in the role.

The Middle East faces many challenges and threats, with the continuation of armed conflicts in various countries in the region and foreign intervention in the affairs of a number of them, resulting in the weakening or even collapse of State institutions and the creation of fertile ground for the emergence of terrorist groups that continue to threaten the security of the region and the stability of its peoples. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has also contributed to people's suffering. In most countries in the region, the health sector is in decline as a result of years of conflict, and medical assistance is difficult to provide to those in need because of conditions on the ground. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and emphasizes the importance of settling conflicts and disputes through constructive dialogue and by peaceful means, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in a way that helps to eradicate the causes of tension in the region.

The Arab Gulf region has witnessed an important development, namely, the outcome of the Summit of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, held in Saudi Arabia, which reflected the determination of the countries of the Council to promote collective measures and address the challenges that could hinder Gulf action, in order to achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the Gulf. The Ula Declaration also represents an important step towards promoting regional stability and achieving Gulf integration, which will contribute to the establishment of security and stability in the Middle East.

On the basis of the wise vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Kingdom of Bahrain emphasizes the importance of encouraging the international community to develop a comprehensive vision to address the security, political, economic and health challenges, which begins with the establishment of peace, security and stability. Therefore, in accordance with its consistent policy of promoting a culture of peace, coexistence, tolerance, understanding, acceptance of others and respect for neighbouring countries, the Kingdom of Bahrain signed a declaration of peace with Israel, followed by memorandums of understanding between the two countries in a number of areas. In those memorandums, fruitful bilateral cooperation is established and opportunities are provided to consolidate efforts to bring about just and comprehensive peace in the region and build regional confidence, in order to make progress towards resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-State solution, pursuant to the resolutions of the agreed-upon international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Houthi militias, supported by Iran, continue to commit cowardly acts of terrorism against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We strongly condemn these repeated terrorist attacks, and Bahrain stands with Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to preserve its national security.

At the political level, we appreciate the sincere Saudi efforts that contributed to the implementation by the Yemeni parties, represented by the legitimate Government and the Southern Transitional Council, of the Riyadh agreement, which is essential to strengthening and unifying Yemeni efforts to confront these terrorist militias and achieve the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

In conclusion, the complex, intertwined challenges facing the Middle East oblige us to act collectively while respecting the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations — the most important of which is non-intervention in the domestic affairs of States — honouring our commitment to good neighbourliness and mutual respect and resolving crises peacefully so that the region can enjoy peace and stability.

Annex 23**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima**

I wish to commend Tunisia for its successful stewardship of the work of the Security Council in January 2021. I also take this opportunity to warmly congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland for his appointment as Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process. I thank the briefers for their comprehensive briefings to the Council today.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of the Niger on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (annex 21). I wish to add the following points in my national capacity.

The year 2020 was an extremely difficult one for the whole world due to the pandemic's grave consequences on human health and devastating effects on national economies. The pandemic has torn apart the fabric of each and every society in the world, including in the occupied Palestinian territories. It was Israel's obligation to protect the health and safety of all people in the occupied territories under its control, but they miserably failed to do so. The situation could not be more egregious for the people of Palestine, as Israel, the occupying Power, continues to exploit the pandemic and aggressively advance its settlement and annexation schemes, entrenching its 53-year military occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Throughout the course of 2020, the Israeli security forces killed over 70 people, including women and children, injured thousand others and forcibly displaced many innocent Palestinians from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These are demonstration of the brutality of the occupying Israeli authorities reflecting an occupation system that works primarily to demolish structures instead of planning to reflect the Palestinian population's present and future needs.

Despite repeated calls on the Israeli authorities not to deal with settlements, fresh approval was given on 17 January 2021 to construct some 780 homes in settlements across the West Bank. Echoing the Secretary-General's call of 18 January, we express our deep concern at the decision to continue settlement activity, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. We call upon the international community to get Israel to cease its systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human-rights principles.

I would like to raise one crucial point with regard to the management of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Concerns have been expressed about the discriminatory way Israeli authorities have implemented the vaccine policy since commencing roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines, disregarding their obligations with regard to Palestinians' health care. We call on the Israeli authorities to immediately comply with their obligations under international law to the occupied population in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by ensuring the provision of vaccines to all persons in the territory under its control, as well as to Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli facilities. The differential access to vaccination between Israelis and Palestinians in the midst of the pandemic is deplorable and unacceptable.

Bangladesh reiterates its unwavering support to the people of Palestine and fully endorses the calls to ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the rights of self-determination, based on the two-State solution using the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian State.

Furthermore, we call for the maintenance of the sanctity of Islamic and Christian holy places, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, at all costs.

Bangladesh welcomes the recent announcement that the legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections will take place on 22 May, 31 July and 31 August 2021, respectively. We express hope that all countries will support this electoral process to ensure Palestinian national reconciliation.

The international community, including the United Nations, has repeatedly expressed serious concerns in the past over cycles of violence, allegations of excessive use of force by the Israeli forces, and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. These concerns remain unheeded and, therefore, valid even today due to the lack of strong punitive actions.

To change the course, accountability and an end to impunity must become immediate priorities for the international community. Impunity for Israel's ongoing violations has merely furthered such practices, which undermine any prospects of an equitable and peaceful solution, as stated in relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016) and other peace initiatives.

The international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, must act to ensure accountability for all Israeli violations and to provide protection for the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory. The international community must ensure that the Palestinian people enjoy their rights, using all international legal mechanisms, including, if necessary, sanctions, to end the occupation of the State of Palestine.

During the celebration last year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, our leaders made a clarion call to resolve the Palestinian crisis. We cannot sit idle anymore.

Annex 24**Statement of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

Brazil would like to thank Tunisia for convening this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East.

The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains relevant to peace and stability in the Middle East. Building on the momentum generated by the signing of the Abraham Accords, we encourage the parties to resume negotiations and engage in new and creative diplomatic efforts in order to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement. Brazil reiterates its support for a negotiated two-State solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security.

Strengthening Palestinian institutions is a crucial step for achieving a solution based on two democratic and sovereign States. We therefore commend the Palestinian Authority's announcement that there will be legislative and presidential elections later this year.

We have also noted the Commissioner-General's urgent call for additional funding for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). As a member of its Advisory Commission, Brazil reaffirms its willingness to cooperate with the Agency, in accordance with its capabilities, as we did throughout 2020.

The conflict in Syria continues to take an increasing toll on human life. More than 75 per cent of the Syrian population is now in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the latest Global Humanitarian Overview. The situation is worsened by the spread of the pandemic and its effects on the economic well-being of the most vulnerable populations. Given this grim reality, the humanitarian exemptions for any sanctions programme related to Syria must be closely followed so as to ensure that they do not undermine access to food and essential health supplies. The protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, and compliance with international humanitarian law must also remain priorities.

Brazil reaffirms its support to the efforts of the Special Envoy, Geir Pedersen, in facilitating a solution to the conflict through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We took note of the fourth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee, earlier in December, and hope that its members can make substantial progress in their coming session. Brazil remains convinced that only a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, United Nations-facilitated political process, with due regard for the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity, will bring lasting peace and provide relief for the suffering of the Syrian population.

Regarding the situation in Yemen, Brazil strongly condemns the attack that took place in Aden on 30 December, targeting the newly formed governmental Cabinet. The injuring and killing of innocent civilians are unacceptable under any circumstances and must be put to an end.

The attack is a tragic reminder of the need to make progress in the path towards peace in Yemen. We urge all parties to renounce the escalation of violence and to engage in good faith in direct talks under the leadership of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who has our full support. Additionally, we call on the parties to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access, as well as to respect their obligations under humanitarian law.

We have taken note of the United States decision to designate the Houthis as a terrorist organization. We welcome that country's commitment to ensuring that humanitarian aid and commercial imports can continue unimpeded.

Brazil welcomes the much-sought rapprochement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as they reopened their airspace and borders on 4 January. The occasion marked the resolution of the diplomatic crisis between some of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. We also commend the efforts of Kuwait and the United States in mediating the three and a half year-long dispute.

Brazil is following closely the developments of the intra-Libyan talks and commends the constructive discussions held in Geneva this month under the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. We hope that progress on the political track will have an impact on the situation on the ground, helping to consolidate a lasting and comprehensive ceasefire. The arms embargo is also an indispensable element to de-escalate the conflict, and we reiterate our call for its full implementation.

As we consider the situation in the Middle East, it is necessary to bear in mind that long-term political stability and economic prosperity are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Efforts to support the peaceful resolution of conflicts should be coupled with initiatives to promote socioeconomic growth, which are key to building resilient and inclusive societies.

In addition, it is important to point out that religious minority communities often withstand violence and persecution, particularly in times of conflict. Safeguarding religious freedom should therefore be kept a high priority, so that those communities can continue to live in their own country and practice their faith in peace and dignity.

Finally, after almost 10 years, as Brazil reaches the end of an era heading up the Maritime Task Force of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Security Council and all those who collaborated with Brazilian peacekeepers during that time. Brazil remains ready to engage constructively with all its partners in efforts directed at promoting a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

Annex 25**Statement by the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Cheikh Niang**

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like, at the outset, to congratulate Tunisia for its able presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi for his presence at today's meeting as a testimony of Tunisia's long-standing support for the Palestinian cause, including through its membership of the Committee.

I wish to acknowledge the presence at this debate of Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norway's Foreign Minister, and of Mr. Riyad Al-Malki, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine.

The Committee would like to congratulate India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway upon taking their seats on the Council and wishes them every success in exercising their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

Allow me to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, former Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his tireless efforts and commitment to bringing about a just and lasting solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Similarly, I welcome Mr. Tor Wennesland, the newly appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to whom the Committee wishes success in bringing the peace process to its rightful and long-overdue conclusion: a just peace that will ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence. The Committee's support to his endeavours will not waver.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further undermined the already fragile social, economic, humanitarian and political situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, complicated by the crippling restrictions on movement and access imposed for decades by Israel, the occupying Power.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, Israel has continued to expand its illegal settlement network in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The most recent announcement concerns the construction of nearly 800 new housing units in the West Bank and the retroactive so-called "regularization" under Israeli law of two additional illegal outposts, decisions that have been broadly denounced by the international community. This is the first announcement of the year of furthering illegal settlements, following a record for Israel's settlement campaign in 2020, as attested to by the reports of various organizations, including the Israeli organization Peace Now. Moreover, a newly open road in the Jerusalem area separating Palestinians and Jewish settlers along its entire track, and which has been called "the apartheid road" even by Israeli media and human rights groups, offers yet more evidence that annexation remains very much on the table for the Government of Israel and is being continually pursued.

Allow me to reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied areas are illegal under international law, as reaffirmed, *inter alia*, in resolution 2334 (2016), and constitute an obstacle to peace. The Committee calls on Israel to immediately halt all settlement construction and expansion and all measures of *de facto* annexation.

The Committee further highlights paragraph 5 of the resolution, which calls on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that must include their dealings

with regard to settlement activities. That would also apply to the labelling of products originating in Israeli settlements.

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the Palestinian civilian population, the Committee echoes the concern expressed by many about the way in which Israeli authorities are rolling-out the COVID-19 vaccine, disregarding their obligations to ensure public health in the occupied territory. The Committee calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately comply with its duties under international humanitarian law by ensuring the provision of vaccines to the Palestinian population under its control in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as to Palestinian prisoners and detainees being held in Israeli jails.

In the absence of accountability, Israel's measures to acquire more Palestinian territory, demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures, as well as forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, settlers' violence and other violations of human rights and international law, continue unchecked. The Committee calls on Israel and the international community to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian People are respected and upheld, including the inalienable right to live in freedom and dignity in an independent and sovereign State.

The Committee supports the call made by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, for an international peace conference under the auspices of an expanded Middle East Quartet that would allow regional players to contribute to the advancement of the peace process. The Committee calls upon the Secretary-General to follow-up on the request made to him to facilitate the resumption of Quartet efforts to that end. The Committee also reiterates the importance of the roles of the General Assembly and the Security Council in promoting a peaceful solution of the question of Palestine and urges serious mobilization in that regard.

The Committee calls on all parties to refrain from unilateral acts that would jeopardize the possibility of restarting the peace process. Israeli and Palestinian leaders should seize the opportunity to re-engage in meaningful negotiations to realize the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee stresses the centrality of the Arab Peace Initiative, the plans for the convening of an international peace conference, the recent meeting of the Middle East Quartet, as well as the efforts of Egypt and others in advancing the reconciliation process among the Palestinians.

The Committee joins the Secretary-General in welcoming the decree issued recently by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative and presidential elections starting in May 2021, as a way to renew democratic pillars in a way that would embody and implement the hope of generations of Palestinians for a just, peaceful and prosperous future.

In the meantime, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to struggle with severe financial problems, as witnessed in recent months by its inability to pay staff salaries and deliver urgently needed humanitarian and livelihood support to Palestine refugees in need and the great anxiety that has caused within the refugee community. The Committee reiterates its call on Member States to maintain their strong support to UNRWA and commits to continuing its support for the Agency to attract international solidarity with Palestinian refugees in a way that is sustainable, predictable and long-term.

Ahead of the proposed international conference later in 2021 to discuss and adopt a strategy for a sustainable UNRWA, on 23 February, the Committee will convene a virtual meeting with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Philippe

Lazzarini, with a view to help mobilize international solidarity with Palestinian refugees and support to UNRWA.

In 2021, the Committee will continue to engage with Member States and regional groups in view of harnessing wider support for the new opportunities lying ahead for the advancement of the Palestinian cause. In that context, the Committee will support every initiative aimed at the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and a just solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions that ensure two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

Let us turn the tragic phase in which we are living into a historic moment of bold action taking us to the just solution of allowing Israelis and Palestinians to enjoy to the fullest their human rights and endless possibilities for a bright and prosperous future.

Annex 26**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations**

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important and timely open debate. Allow me to congratulate Tunisia on its successful presidency of the Security Council in January.

Costa Rica welcomes the recent appointment of Mr. Tor Wennesland as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and of Ms. Lynn Hastings as Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, where she will also serve as the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory. I would also like to reiterate my delegation's full support as they exercise their duties. Costa Rica also welcomes the recent announcement made by the Palestinian Authority to hold general and presidential elections for the first time in 14 years, starting with legislative elections on 22 May. By the same token, we celebrate the normalization of ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of the Sudan and — most recently — the Kingdom of Morocco.

Nevertheless, Costa Rica would like to stress three points.

As we have stated previously in the Council, we are deeply concerned by the increase in Israeli annexation plans, settlement expansion, demolitions, seizures and evictions. We regret the recent announcement made by the Israeli Government regarding plans for the construction of approximately 800 homes for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank. We express our deep concern about the data provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, recognizing 2020 as the second highest in terms of demolitions of Palestinian structures since the agency began keeping such statistics in 2009. We reiterate that under international law these settlements, expansions, demolitions and seizures are all illegal. We call on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities and to freeze the demolitions and seizure of Palestinian structures.

Regarding the ongoing vaccination process, we urge Israel to ensure swift, fair and equitable access to the vaccine to those who are under its occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. The right to health is a fundamental human right and Israel, duly hailed as the country which has to date achieved the widest vaccination coverage in proportion to its population size, is also required by the Fourth Geneva Convention to maintain health services in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that those who cannot purchase vaccines on the global market have their needs met fairly and adequately.

Finally, we welcome the recent meeting held between Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan aiming at both the revitalization of the Middle East Quartet and the reactivation of bilateral peace negotiations. Costa Rica reiterates that the only path towards a peaceful and equitable solution to the long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine requires dialogue and direct negotiations between the parties based on international law, Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters, recognizing that the two-State solution is an indispensable requirement to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East region.

Annex 27**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, Pedro Luis Pedrosa Cuesta**

[Original: English and Spanish]

We support the statement delivered by the representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In this first 2021 open debate on the situation in the Middle East, we reiterate the condemnation of the attacks launched against Aden International Airport, on 30 December 2020, which resulted in the death of over 30 civilians and injured dozens of other people. We express our heartfelt sympathies to the families and closed relatives of the victims.

We welcome the decision of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to normalize their relations.

The pandemic has forced us to face a new reality which poses colossal challenges to health systems, economies and our societies at large. Its manifold effects call for joint actions that privilege cooperation and solidarity over political differences.

We reiterate our deep concern over the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on the countries of the Middle East and call for serious efforts to prevent any action that could lead to a sharper deterioration of stability and security in that region.

As the pandemic compounds the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people, Israel continues its occupation, its policies of annexation, its escalation of the illegal and colonizing practices and measures, including the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, punitive demolitions, seizures of resources from Palestinian institutions, the forced displacement of hundreds of civilians and the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

It is disturbing that another year has ended without the Security Council taking action to end Israel's military aggression and occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with its resolution 2334 (2016); while Israel, with impunity, is reinforcing its policy of illegal settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory and threatens to annex the Palestinian territories of the Jordan Valley and other areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We call once again on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, and to call for Israel's immediate and complete halt of all its colonizing policies and practices.

We reaffirm our unrestricted support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which allows the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to have an independent and sovereign State on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and which guarantees the right of return for the refugees.

We express our unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and Government and our support for the admission of the State of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. We also support the Palestinian President's initiative to hold an international peace conference.

We regret the precarious situation in which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East finds itself as a result of the withdrawal of the United States financial support.

The aggressive, unilateral and unjustified actions of the United States in the Middle East severely undermine the legitimate interests of the Arab and Islamic nations and lead to a dangerous escalation in the region.

We reiterate our rejection of the so-called deal of the century, drawn up by the previous United States Administration, which ignores the two-State solution, which has been historically supported by the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation and other international actors.

The unilateral decision of the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to establish its diplomatic mission in that city, disrespecting its historical status, as well as recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan, constitute serious violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We call, once again, for the total and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and from all occupied Arab territories.

We ratify our full support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and our rejection of the United States' withdrawal from the agreement, as well as its attempts to ignore the validity of resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed the plan.

We support the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation imposed on Syria, without foreign involvement and with full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We reaffirm our strongest condemnation of the United States' sanctions against Syria and the implementation of the Caesar Act, which hampers the reconstruction of that country, especially in the complex scenario of COVID-19, and blatantly violates the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the human rights of the Syrian people.

It is inadmissible that some countries experience the application of unilateral coercive measures which violate the human rights of their peoples, international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We call for the immediate and unconditional end to those arbitrary and illegal measures imposed against sovereign States. Their application in the current juncture creates additional difficulties to confront the pandemic in the countries against which they are enacted.

The defence of the right to peace continues to be a paramount priority for Cuba. We support the urgent call of the Secretary-General to put an end to armed conflicts, hostilities and the scourge of war and instead open up opportunities for diplomacy and cooperation. All wars, including unconventional wars and the so-called low-intensity warfare, must cease.

It is the duty of all States to uphold multilateralism and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereign equality of States and their political independence, unity and territorial integrity; the peaceful resolution of conflicts; non-interference in the internal affairs of States and refraining from the use or threat of use of force in international relations.

Annex 28**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Tunisia on its successful presidency of the Security Council in January 2021.

Ecuador is addressing the Council to reiterate its position on the question of Palestine, reaffirm its solidarity with Palestine and reiterate its commitment to alleviating the difficult situation faced by its people, which will be achieved only with a political, peaceful, final and just solution for the parties, based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, within the recognized borders of 1967.

This first debate of the year on the Palestinian question is marked by worrisome news — according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), demolitions continue at alarming levels. The destruction of property, including houses, animal shelters, latrines and solar panels, which are essential to the livelihoods, well-being and dignity of community members, is further exacerbated by the threat of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In that regard, the international community must reject any kind of illegal settlement policy, in particular demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian-owned structures, including water and sanitation and humanitarian assistance structures, throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

According to OCHA, as of November 2020, 689 structures had been demolished in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, more than in any full year since 2016, leaving 869 Palestinians homeless. Ecuador expresses its concern about the humanitarian situation, human rights violations and non-compliance with international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Furthermore, Ecuador rejects any kind of incitement to violence, which further distances the parties from a solution. We reiterate the call made in resolution 2334 (2016) on both parties to demonstrate calm and restraint and to act in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law.

We express our deep concern about annexation measures that constitute serious violations of international law, as well as seriously affect the possibility of a two-State solution and undermine the prospects for renewed negotiations.

We call on all parties to make collective efforts to initiate credible negotiations and to strengthen regional and international diplomatic efforts to achieve without delay a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Finally, the Security Council must ensure the effective implementation of resolution 2532 (2020) and a global ceasefire and cessation of violence.

Annex 29**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on the Tunisian presidency of the Security Council this month, and to welcome your efforts to lead the Council's work in the light of the many challenges facing the international community as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

I would also like to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his briefing and wish him well in his new role. Egypt appreciates the efforts made by his predecessor, Nickolay Mladenov, over a period of some five years, to settle the Palestinian question and bring peace to the Middle East.

Egypt aligns itself with the statements of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Group of Arab States and the Islamic Group.

As we begin this year's first open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the region continues to suffer the repercussions of the many crises that arose in the last decade and to face long-standing crises that have resulted in insecurity and instability. The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic, social and humanitarian consequences have worsened the humanitarian situation and deepened the crises in the Middle East. In particular, the fact that large numbers of Arab citizens have migrated and sought asylum in the last decade has compounded their pandemic-related suffering.

Egypt has always emphasized that the crises in the Middle East in the past decade should not divert our attention from the issue that is at the heart of security and stability in the region, namely, the Palestinian question. The Arab peoples continue to look forward, as they have for generations, to the liberation of all the Arab territories occupied in 1967, in both Palestine and the occupied Syrian Golan.

Although the Council continues to monitor developments related to the Palestinian question, the situation has worsened significantly, and international efforts have failed to halt the deterioration on the ground. The Israelis have maintained the pace of their settlement activity and have in fact increased it by announcing the construction of thousands of housing units in settlements in the West Bank. Those units will further isolate the city of Jerusalem from the West Bank and undermine the chances of achieving the two-State solution. Their construction runs counter to international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016). The project represents the imposition of a *fait accompli* and the tacit implementation of the Israeli annexation plan, which Egypt and the entire international community have opposed.

The occupying Power has also continued to confiscate Palestinian land, expel Palestinians and demolish their homes. Israeli settlers have violated the rights of the Palestinian people in the West Bank. The holy places in Jerusalem have not been spared. Israeli incursions and violations in the Haram Al-Sharif have continued despite the site's particular importance to Muslims around the world. Egypt therefore affirms its total rejection of any attempt to Judaize Jerusalem and supports the efforts of the Jordanian Hashemite custodianship of the holy places to preserve the historical status quo in Jerusalem.

The only way of remedying the current deteriorating situation is to resume negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis under the auspices of the Quartet, in accordance with the initiative of the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud

Abbas, to hold an international peace conference. In that way, the negotiations would be based on agreed-upon international terms of reference and relevant authoritative international resolutions, in all of which the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is affirmed.

Egypt believes that the Palestinian people must be supported and that the right atmosphere must be created for the resumption of negotiations between the two sides through practical steps on the ground to alleviate that people's suffering, especially in the humanitarian field and in view of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the blockade of the Gaza Strip must be lifted and donor countries must support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East so that it can address its financial crisis and fully implement its mandate in the light of its vital role in supporting Palestinian refugees. Egypt will also continue to communicate with the Palestinian and Israeli sides and all regional and international partners, particularly the Munich format countries, to support the Quartet's efforts to resume negotiations.

I can only welcome the presidential decree on the holding of legislative and presidential elections, and elections to the Palestinian National Council. The decree is important in terms of support for the institutions of the Palestinian State and the achievement of national reconciliation, for which Egypt continues to strive.

Egypt endorses the call for a global ceasefire, including the appeal made by the Secretary-General, to enable the peoples of the region to address the enormous challenges arising from the pandemic and lay the groundwork for a comprehensive political process based on the terms of reference set out in the relevant Council resolutions on resolving protracted regional conflicts. The United Nations must ensure that efforts to resolve the crises in Syria and Yemen peacefully are guided by the peoples of those countries, free from foreign intervention, and that the countries' sovereignty and independence, and the unity and integrity of their peoples and territories, are maintained.

Egypt also supports the efforts of the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General for Syria and Yemen to reach a political settlement, a comprehensive ceasefire and the implementation of relevant Council resolutions, and emphasizes the need for the Council to play a more active role in efforts for the political settlement of those crises, in order to help to establish conditions for the voluntary and safe return of refugees.

Egypt therefore welcomes the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and the successful formation of a new Government in Yemen. It condemns the vicious terrorist attack on Aden airport, which was intended to prevent the Government from performing its historic mission within Yemen.

Egypt reiterates its deep concern at the alarming findings set out in the ninth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) (S/2020/531), issued in June 2020. Those findings relate to the origin of smuggled weapons seized en route to Yemen, and of the missiles and uncrewed aerial vehicles used in attacks on vital facilities in Saudi Arabia in 2019. Egypt also warns of continuing operations targeting vessels and jeopardizing the freedom of international navigation.

Egypt continues to support all efforts to reach a political settlement in Libya in order to restore the peace, stability and prosperity that the Libyan people deserve, and emphasizes the need for Libyans themselves to take the primary responsibility in that regard. Egypt welcomes the recent appointment of Ján Kubiš as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Libya, wishes him every success in leading United Nations

efforts related to Libya in the future and stands ready to provide all necessary support for the fulfilment of his mandate. Egypt also stands unequivocally with the Libyan people and is open to consultation with representatives of all regions of the country in order to help that people achieve the desired peace and put the Libyan national interest above the narrow political interests of certain factions. Egypt is following with interest the outcome of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, including the mechanism for selecting the interim executive authority, and looks forward to a successful transition period until elections are held in the country in December 2021.

Egypt also supports the recent ceasefire agreement, to which it contributed through the meeting in Hurgada, which brought together representatives of the Libyan Joint Military Commission before its meeting in Geneva to approve the agreement. It looks forward to implementing all the provisions of the agreement, particularly the departure of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya out of respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Lastly, Egypt reiterates the importance of continuing economic reforms in Libya to preserve the resources of the Libyan people, ensure that the nation's wealth is equitably distributed throughout the country and prevent that wealth from being disbursed in ways it is not supposed to. Egypt is doing its utmost to make those efforts a success as co-chair of the economic working group established as part of the Berlin process and is supporting the Libyan Expert Economic Commission to that end.

As the year begins, we look forward to peace in our region, the realization of our peoples' aspirations to live in security, peace and stability, and the channelling of efforts towards building a better tomorrow for future generations.

Annex 30**Statement by the Head of Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, Olof Skoog**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The European Union remains united in its commitment to achieving a two-State solution that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent-status issues in order to end the conflict.

The EU remains ready to support both parties in efforts to resume meaningful negotiations on all final-status issues in order to achieve a just and lasting peace. The EU and its member States will continue to work actively, also on a bilateral basis, to support all efforts to help resume meaningful negotiations between the parties, engaging with all relevant stakeholders, including members of the Quartet and partners in the region, notably Egypt and Jordan, which recently met with France and Germany in Cairo. The EU welcomes the appointment of Mr. Tor Wennesland as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and looks forward to working with him and supporting him in fulfilling his mandate, including within the framework of the Middle East Quartet. The EU is grateful to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his tireless efforts as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process over the past years.

The EU has welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of countries in recent months. The EU believes that those developments represent a positive contribution to peace and stability in the region. Israel's commitment to suspending plans to unilaterally annex areas of the occupied Palestinian territory is a positive step. Any unilateral decision that undermines a lasting, agreed solution should be avoided. The EU reiterates that any annexation would constitute a serious violation of international law.

The EU strongly opposes all actions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution and urges both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to a two-State solution in order to rebuild trust and create a path back to meaningful negotiations.

The EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy, which is illegal under international law, and actions taken in that context such as demolitions and confiscations, including of humanitarian structures and EU-funded projects, evictions and forced transfers. The EU calls on Israel to halt continued settlement expansion and demolitions in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, especially in sensitive areas such as Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and the E-1 zone, which seriously threaten the two-State solution. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

The violence and loss of human lives in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel remain of deep concern to the EU. The Palestinian population continues to face repeated human rights violations and abuses. The EU recalls the importance of unhindered work of civil society organizations, both in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The worsening humanitarian and human rights situation in the Gaza Strip remains of grave concern, and the EU calls for an end to the closure; the full opening of the crossing points while addressing Israel's security concerns; and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors.

The EU firmly condemns the rocket, incendiary balloon and other attacks from the Gaza Strip targeting civilians in Israel, as well as terrorist attacks and any other form of violence, including a continued upward trend of settler-related incidents, and incitement on all sides. While recalling Israel's right to defend its legitimate security interests, the EU expects the Israeli authorities to fully meet their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, not least in these difficult times of the coronavirus pandemic and including with regard to Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons.

The Palestinian Legislative Council was dissolved in December 2018. Strong, inclusive, accountable and functioning democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are vital to the two-State solution. In that context, the EU welcomes the recent decree-law by President Abbas on holding legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections in the coming months, starting with legislative elections on 22 May. That is an important development, as participative, representative and accountable democratic institutions are key to Palestinian self-determination and State-building. The EU calls upon all Palestinian factions to unequivocally commit to democratic principles prior to the elections. The EU stands ready to engage with the relevant actors to support the electoral process. The EU also calls on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the holding of elections across all the Palestinian territory.

The EU recalls that a lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The EU reiterates its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel, including with regard to current and emerging threats in the region.

The EU reiterates its deep and genuine appreciation for the work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and for its dedicated staff, who are working in an extremely difficult and challenging context. UNRWA is an essential provider of vital services to millions of Palestine refugees and a stabilizing force in the region. Until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee issue in accordance with international law is found, UNRWA remains crucial to providing the necessary protection and essential services for Palestinian refugees, and we will continue to support UNRWA in all its fields of operation, including in East Jerusalem. The EU welcomes the additional financial support from other and new donors and calls upon all partners to increase their contributions to UNRWA.

Allow me to turn to the situation in Syria.

After a decade of conflict, the violence and instability in Syria continue to cause enormous suffering, and millions are still displaced. Violations of international law, including abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, by all parties, particularly by the Syrian regime and its allies, remain persistent.

The crisis continues to have profound repercussions for the overall stability of the entire region. The human devastation of the country endures. The strain of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic adds to the gravity of the situation.

In the north-west, the situation remains fragile. The EU reiterates its call on all parties to uphold the present ceasefire to guarantee the protection of civilians on the ground and from air strikes.

The EU continues to call upon the Syrian regime and its allies to fully respect international humanitarian law and in particular to permanently cease indiscriminate air strikes and shelling on civilians and humanitarian workers. The EU also notes with concern the ongoing insecurity in the north-east of Syria and reiterates its call for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The EU insists further that the Syrian regime must fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), including its investigations of the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, and deplores the lack of cooperation of the Syrian regime as shown by the report of the OPCW Director-General released on 14 October 2020 following the July 2020 Executive Council decision. As set out in that decision, it will now be the duty of the Conference of the States Parties to decide on a further course of action. We welcome the draft decision entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” and call on all States parties to fulfil their responsibility and uphold the credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Respect for international humanitarian law must be ensured at all times and in all circumstances. We reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a violation of international law and unacceptable anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances, and that impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated.

While the EU welcomed the decision taken by the Security Council on 11 July 2020 to extend the authorization for cross-border humanitarian assistance to people in need in Syria for a further 12 months (resolution 2533 (2020)), the authorization of only one crossing point, in the north-west, is disappointing. The renewal of the decision by the Security Council on the authorization for cross-border assistance in July 2021 will be vital. The EU continues to demand that all parties in conflict, in particular the Syrian regime, allow safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian convoys and humanitarian actors to the Syrian population in need in all parts of Syria.

Turkey is a key partner of the European Union and a critically important actor in the Syrian crisis and the region. Turkey’s security concerns in north-east Syria should be addressed through political and diplomatic means, not with military action, and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The EU remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian State and recalls that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), negotiated by the Syrian parties within the United Nations-led Geneva process.

All those responsible for breaches of international law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. The EU reiterates its call to have the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court. In the absence of avenues for international justice, the prosecution of war crimes under national jurisdiction where possible, as for example in Germany, and the initiative of the Netherlands to invoke Syria’s responsibility for human rights violations represent an important contribution towards securing justice. Moreover, we will continue to support efforts to gather evidence with a view to future legal action, including by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. The EU further welcomes the report of the Commission of Inquiry and expresses its concern about the report’s findings.

The EU fully supports the efforts of UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and has welcomed the establishment of the Syrian-led Constitutional Committee under United Nations auspices. A fourth round of talks took place in December last year

despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU is encouraged by the fact that the parties agreed to meet this week for a fifth round. The EU urges the Syrian regime to engage in the Committee's work in good faith and with the aim of making urgent and concrete progress on constitutional reform. The EU reiterates that all elements of resolution 2254 (2015) must be implemented, including the issue of detainees and missing persons and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in order for free and fair elections to be held under United Nations supervision.

Regarding the situation of refugees and of internally displaced persons, the EU continues to voice strong concern about reports of social and demographic engineering in all areas throughout Syria and mass waves of displacement, *inter alia* in parts of the north-west and north-east. The EU insists that their return to their places of origin can be encouraged only if it can take place in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner, in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and in accordance with international law. The underlying causes of the refugee and displacement crisis must be addressed through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

The EU, in line with EU Council conclusions, will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, in the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process, is firmly under way.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani**

Let me begin by congratulating His Excellency Mr. Tor Wennesland on his appointment as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I wish him every success in accomplishing his mission and assure him of our support. I would like to also express my appreciation to the Special Coordinator and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for their briefings. Unfortunately, through their briefings, we continue to hear appalling reports from the ground. I would like to touch on three pertinent points.

First, all forms of violence, provocation and the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory must stop. My delegation is appalled at the continuing provocative actions and violence towards Palestinian civilians as well as forced evictions and the demolition of houses, schools and livelihood-related infrastructure by the occupying Power. Indonesia condemns violence of all kinds and urges that that vicious circle of violence and provocation be brought to an end.

Moreover, again the Israeli authorities have continued on their path of violations and complete disregard of international law by approving yet another illegal settlement expansion. We demand that the Israeli authorities reverse such decisions and immediately cease all their illegal settlement activities. We also continue to urge the international community to reaffirm the illegality of the settlements. Those settlements are illegal and in flagrant violation of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Secondly, there is a need to provide the coronavirus disease vaccine to the Palestinian population. We urge the Israeli authorities to stop their discriminatory and unequal distribution of the vaccines, which has excluded millions of Palestinians from access thereto. We demand that Israel, as the occupying Power, fulfil its obligation under international law to protect the lives and safety of the Palestinian population by providing that much-needed vaccine.

We also urge the international community, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Health Organization, to continue to extend its support to the Palestinians and to leave no one behind. In that regard, Indonesia once again appeals to the international community to extend its full support to UNRWA's vital work on the front lines of the crisis in providing education, health and social services.

Thirdly and finally, let me touch on our support for successful elections. Indonesia welcomes the presidential decree recently issued by President Mahmoud Abbas on the holding of legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections starting in May this year.

We extend our support to the efforts to ensure successful elections and share the Secretary-General's view that those elections will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity and giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine.

We remain hopeful with respect to the continued intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks and stress the importance of unity within Palestine to create a conducive and inclusive environment for the peace process.

In conclusion, we once again urge the occupying Power to adhere to international law, particularly international humanitarian law, and the related Security Council resolutions. We call upon the international community to demand

accountability and ensure that any violations by the occupying Power will have consequences. Indonesia's support for the Palestinian cause has been consistent and an integral part of its foreign policy. We affirm the Palestinian struggle to achieve a contiguous independent State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Let me once again assure Council members that Indonesia will remain steadfast and unyielding in its support of the Palestinian cause.

Annex 32**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi**

The Palestinians ended the year 2020 while the occupation of their lands and the brutalities of the occupying Power persisted. The killing of more than 70 Palestinians, including nearly 20 children and women, wounding more than 6,740 others, including a large number of women and children, and demolishing or seizing over 590 Palestinian structures, as well as displacing nearly 690 people, were only the tip of the submerged iceberg of the oppressions of the Israeli forces against the Palestinians in the year 2020. The occupying Power also continued its illegal settlement activities and declared its illegal policy to annex further parts of Palestine, as well as maintaining the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip.

In 2020, the plight and suffering of the Palestinians have become manifold and were further exacerbated as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Israeli regime also continued its military adventurism and destabilizing practices in the region, including by invading some regional countries, particularly Syria. It also continued its sabre-rattling and openly and repeatedly threatened regional States. In addition, the occupying Power started the year 2021 with a new round of brutalities against Palestinians, including hampering the access of Palestinians to COVID-19 vaccines, as well as its subversive and disruptive activities in the region.

All such policies and practices are in contravention of the basic principles and norms of international law and a gross violation of the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Despite the fact that, as the world's longest crisis, the Palestinian question has been at the top on the agendas of the General Assembly and the Security Council since the creation of the United Nations, during the past 75 years, the Security Council has been unable to end the decades-long occupation of Palestine, protect the very basic rights of millions of oppressed Palestinians at home and abroad or confront an occupying regime that has shamelessly committed all four core international crimes, not once but several times.

Needless to say, the reason behind the Council's failure to fulfil its duties is the complete and systematic shielding of the Israeli regime by the United States in violation of international law and the principles of humanity and morality. The decades-long inaction by the Security Council has seriously emboldened the Israeli regime to brazenly continue all its unlawful acts and inhumane practices with total impunity, an example of which is the killing of about 100,000 Palestinians and Arabs since 1948 until this day, as recently announced by the President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Similarly, during the same period, the Israeli regime has pursued systematic ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination against Palestinians, the intensive and systematic Judaization of Palestine, particularly by changing the demographic composition and Islamic and Arabic identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the systematic confiscation of land and the demolition of Palestinian homes. The list goes on and on.

The inaction of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, has seriously eroded the trust and confidence in the Council and resulted in the credibility and legitimacy crisis of this body. That inaction cannot continue indefinitely and must therefore come to an end. The Security Council has a special responsibility in that regard and must act decisively in resolving the question of Palestine in accordance with the principles of justice and international law.

The international community must also do everything in its power to address this crisis and prevent its further deterioration and its negative consequences for regional and international peace and security. To that end, the United States must be compelled to put an end to its irresponsible policy of unreservedly supporting the unlawful acts of the Israeli regime and the complete and systematic shielding of Israel against the Security Council's criticism.

Furthermore, the Israeli regime must be compelled to end the occupation of all Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon and to stop all its destabilizing activities in the region, including the systematic violation of the sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon. The Israeli regime must also be forced to put an end to its continued construction and expansion of settlements, as well as the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip.

I would like to reiterate that the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to support the just cause of the Palestinian people and the full realization of all their inalienable rights, including their inherent right to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian State throughout Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Today, the representative of the Israeli regime made unsubstantiated claims about Iran's nuclear programme and, through certain fabrications, desperately attempted to portray its peaceful nuclear activities as a threat. That is only to divert attention away from the development by Israel of hundreds of nuclear weapons, which continue to threaten the peace and security of the region and beyond.

Likewise, we recall that, during the past five years, the Israeli regime, in clear violation of resolution 2231 (2015), has spared no effort and missed no opportunity to destroy the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Deception and playing the victim are inspired elements of Israel's foreign policy, which are pursued to cover up its oppression and crimes against Palestinians, as well as its destabilizing policies in the region. The Security Council must therefore be vigilant about the ill intent and disinformation campaign of the Israeli regime.

At the same time, we reserve our inherent right to self-defence and to vigorously respond to any threat, including those made today by the Israeli regime's representative, in clear violation of Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations, requiring the Security Council to hold that regime accountable for such threats.

Annex 33**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

I would like to begin by congratulating Mr. Mladenov on the completion of his duty as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Japan had the privilege to work closely with him and highly appreciated his dedication to realizing peace in the region. I would also like to welcome the appointment of Mr. Wennesland as the new Special Coordinator, and I look forward to working with him.

First and foremost, I would like to reaffirm Japan's commitment to supporting a two-State solution based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. While there are some positive signs, such as the resumption of financial cooperation between the two sides, the situation on the ground remains worrisome. The Government of Israel continues its settlement activities, including the issuance of the settlement tender for about 1,200 housing units in East Jerusalem last November and the decision in January to advance plans for some 800 settlement units that are mostly located deep inside the occupied West Bank. The Government of Japan deeply deplores the continued settlement activities by the Government of Israel despite repeated calls from the international community, including Japan, for a freezing of such activities. Settlement activities are in violation of international law and undermine the viability of a two-State solution. Japan reiterates its call on the Government of Israel to fully freeze those activities.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is another imperative to realizing a two-State solution. In that respect, Japan welcomes the presidential decree of 15 January to hold a series of elections in Palestine. Japan believes the realization of those elections will mark an important step towards establishing a future democratic and independent Palestinian State. The positive engagement of all the parties concerned, including the Palestinian factions as well as the Israeli Government, is essential for the success of the elections. Japan strongly hopes that free, fair and inclusive elections that include voting by Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem will be held. Japan continues to support Palestine as it seeks to achieve unity through those elections, and we will continue to engage constructively in the realization of peace in the Middle East.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to pose serious risks to human security, threatening people's survival, livelihoods and dignity around the world. Palestine is no exception, and the pandemic is adding more difficulties for the Palestinian people on top of the existing ones. Japan highly values the irreplaceable work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in support of the Palestinian people and commends its work to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19. We have therefore made additional contributions to UNRWA since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and Japan's total contribution in 2020 amounted to more than \$30 million.

Most recently, Japan decided to make an additional contribution of \$1.5 million in December for humanitarian assistance, such as the provision of food and winter clothing kits, as well as assistance in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene. One example to which I wish to make particular reference is the Your Health with UNRWA mobile application, developed with Japan's contribution and launched last October. The application allows all registered Palestinians to access their health records and relevant health-care materials online. Japan hope that the project will be conducive to leaving no one's health behind towards achieving universal health coverage in Palestine.

Recognizing the Palestinians' long-standing aspirations for statehood, Japan will continue to help the parties build confidence and provide assistance for Palestinians' State-building efforts. To that end, we will continue to promote our own initiatives, such as the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development.

Once again, I would like to urge both sides to resume direct negotiations, seizing all possible opportunities, and I strongly hope that this year we see new progress towards the realization of peace in the Middle East.

Annex 34**Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ayman Safadi**

[Original: Arabic]

I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Othman Jerandi on the assumption by the Republic of Tunisia of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also congratulate the five new non-permanent members of the Council for the period 2021–2022, namely, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway.

I extend my utmost appreciation and respect to the five members whose terms have just ended for their efforts to maintain international peace and security.

I also thank Nickolay Mladenov for his sincere efforts as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and look forward to working with Tor Wennesland to create real prospects for just and lasting peace in the region.

The Council is meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East, at a time when more effort is needed to protect the peace process and the right of the peoples of the entire region to live in peace and security. A just and lasting peace based on international law is the only way of achieving the two-State solution. It is a strategic Arab choice, a regional and international necessity, and a right for all the peoples of the region.

Jordan will continue to make every effort to bring about a just and comprehensive peace, which must be reflected in an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967 in accordance with the two-State solution and international law, living in peace and security alongside Israel.

However, the chances of achieving the two-State solution — and, therefore, a comprehensive and lasting peace — are receding every day as a result of ongoing illegitimate Israeli actions that undermine that solution and the land for peace principle, which underpins the peace process.

The continued construction and expansion of settlements violates international law and undermines the chances of peace, and the international community must take a clear stand against it. The continued violations in and around the Aqsa Mosque and the Haram al-Sharif are also a breach of the legal obligations of Israel as the occupying Power and a provocation liable to result in escalation. Effective steps must be taken to end the violations in order to protect the right to peace.

A genuine, effective effort is needed to relaunch serious negotiations to establish the political prospect of restoring confidence in the peace process and make the necessary progress towards the two-State solution. No lasting, comprehensive peace can be achieved without an end to the occupation on the basis of the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, which remains the most comprehensive proposal to put an end to the conflict and uphold the right of the region and its peoples to genuine peace. That peace would allow all energies to be directed towards development and a future filled with opportunities and achievements rather than oppression and conflicts. The Quartet must play its essential role in these efforts.

The continued impasse in efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a threat that must be confronted through collective action that restores hope for the viability of the peace process and prevents the entrenchment of despair and the aggravation of the conflict. Jordan will remain a force for just peace and will work

with our sisters, brothers and friends, with all of you, to achieve it. Jordan will also continue to protect the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and preserve their Arab Islamic or Christian identity and their legal and historical status, a priority to which the Kingdom is wholeheartedly devoted, under the direct guidance and monitoring of the sites' custodian, His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must continue to provide its services to refugees, pending a settlement that would uphold their right of return and compensation in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III), as part of a comprehensive settlement of the dispute on the basis of the two-State solution that would bring an end to the occupation that began in 1967. Jordan will continue to cooperate with its partners in the international community and make every possible effort to garner international political and financial support for UNRWA so that the Agency can continue to fulfil its functions, in accordance with its United Nations mandate, for more than 5.5 million Palestine refugees.

In October 2020, Jordan, together with Sweden, hosted a meeting of the Stockholm Group for strategic dialogue on UNRWA to discuss ways of supporting the Agency sustainably. We hope that all States will honour their commitments as soon as possible, and increase them if possible, in order to ensure that UNRWA can continue to provide its services and perform its tasks, including by meeting urgent needs related to the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The challenges are tremendous but will inevitably become even more serious if the process remains paralysed, with efforts to reach a just solution to the Palestinian question blocked by Israeli actions. Peace will not be achieved by perpetuating the occupation, destroying hope and demolishing houses. Let us work together to change this situation by creating conditions that will ensure a return to negotiations as soon as possible, in order to achieve a just peace.

Annex 35**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Tunisia on the success of its presidency of the Security Council this month, and on its wise and competent management of the Council's business. I wish it and all the members of the Council success in their tasks and responsibilities at the start of the Christian year.

I would also like to congratulate Tor Wennesland on his appointment as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We support him and all efforts to calm the situation and restore stability in the light of the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Palestine and the world at large. I must also express our thanks and appreciation to Nickolay Mladenov for his tireless efforts throughout his time as Special Coordinator. We wish him every success in his next post.

As 2021 begins, we are holding our first meeting of the year on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, amid growing concern in the international community about the continuing deterioration in conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory. At a time when the Palestinian authorities are attempting to contain the spread of COVID-19 and overcome the acute shortage of medical equipment, medicines and vaccines as a result of restrictions imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, we note with regret the recent United Nations reports confirming the unprecedented rise in violence against the Palestinian people, the number of arrest campaigns and the demolitions of Palestinian buildings and property, which have reached record levels in the past year.

There is no doubt that lack of accountability and impunity will lead — anywhere, at any time — to the commission of more crimes. That is the case in the occupied Palestinian territories, whose people suffer from crime on a daily basis. The international community must demand that the perpetrators of those crimes and violations be held to account and that Israel fulfil its legal obligations.

It is regrettable that we are starting this year where we finished in 2020; Israel, the occupying Power, continues to disregard international resolutions and grant more approvals for the construction of thousands of housing units in illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General and the international community have condemned those approvals and activities on the grounds that they undermine the two-State solution and flout resolution 2334 (2016), international law, human rights and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The Israeli authorities announced last week that they had authorized the construction of 800 additional housing units in illegal settlements in the West Bank, after allowing the construction of thousands of units this month. The situation constitutes a flagrant violation of the resolution. The illegal Israeli practices must come to an end and all relevant Council resolutions must be implemented.

In contrast to the Israeli practices, the Palestinian Authority began 2021 with the issuance by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, of a decree on the holding of presidential and legislative elections, and elections to the Palestinian National Council. We wish the Palestinian people success and enduring unity, and hope that they can take that important step on the path to Palestinian reconciliation.

The State of Kuwait, which has long defended the rights of the Palestinian people, renews its commitment to the Arab, Islamic and international position, namely, that the Palestinian cause is central to the Arab world and the Arab identity of occupied East Jerusalem. We reaffirm our commitment to peace as a strategic choice and to the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with international law, the relevant authoritative international resolutions, the Land for Peace principle and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, so that the Palestinian people can enjoy all their legitimate political rights and establish an independent State on their land, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Amal Mudallali**

We congratulate Tunisia on assuming the presidency of the Council this month and thank South Africa for its productive presidency in the month of December.

We take this opportunity to congratulate the incoming members of the Security Council and wish them success during their term. We pay tribute to the outgoing members and thank them for their contribution to the Council and towards the maintenance of peace and Security.

Lebanon cannot but underline Tunisia's historic and longstanding commitment to the Palestinian cause and, in this regard, we welcome the focus of this debate on the need to mobilize support to achieve a just and peaceful solution for Palestine. It is the most dearly awaited peace in the world.

A few days ago, we celebrated, in the United States of America, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. A champion of equal rights and justice, Dr. King identified the most important ingredient for peace when he said: "True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice".

For the Palestinians, these past decades have been characterized by the presence of injustice rather than justice, the latest being the approval by Israeli authorities of 800 new settlement units, in continuous defiance of international legality and as part of a continuous effort to deny the Palestinians their inalienable rights to an independent and viable Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to live in peace and dignity.

How could we expect anything different when Israel has been allowed to act with total impunity?

Time and again, Lebanon has called on the Security Council to compel Israel to abide by its legal obligations and move beyond mere condemnation of Israel's constant violations of international law.

There is renewed hope now for a new and more balanced approach to finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, a solution based on international legality and relevant United Nations resolutions. We are indeed hopeful that the new Administration in Washington, D.C., which announced its willingness to prioritize human rights and international legality, will view the Middle East once again through the prism of these two important principles.

The recent statement on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by the nominee to serve as secretary of state of the United States of America, Mr. Anthony Blinken, and his affirmation that the Palestinians are entitled to their State through the so-called two-State solution, as the only way to fulfil the aspirations of the two sides, are a step in the right direction. He stressed the importance of making "sure that neither party takes steps" that make it more difficult to achieve this goal. This is very encouraging.

The recent convening of the Cairo Ministerial Meeting on the Middle East Peace Process, gathering Egypt, Jordan, France and Germany, was another important step in the right direction. The final communiqué truly captured the essence of comprehensive peace in the region by recalling that "the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-State solution is an indispensable requirement".

Lebanon also welcomes the recent announcement by the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held in May and July, respectively, and considers it another step in the right direction towards much-needed Palestinian unity.

As we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of our United Nations, the role of the United Nations and the Security Council is more important than ever in upholding international law and standing by its historic commitments towards the Palestinian people and their rights. It is just as important to impress upon Israel its obligations as occupying Power towards the Palestinian people in every field, including public health and vaccination.

We also wish to congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland of Norway upon his recent appointment as new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and to wish him the best of luck in his new endeavour. We also salute the work of his predecessor Mr. Nikolay Mladenov.

Time is of essence if the international community is to preserve what is left of the basis of a just and comprehensive solution based on two States and the land-for-peace formula. The parameters of a solution are well known, and their basis is still the same as in resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1978) and other relevant resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In the middle of this terrible pandemic and the pain and loss that people around the world are going through, the Lebanese people are suffering another fate. Daily, Israeli fighter jets fly very low over Beirut and all over Lebanon. The planes fly day and night, depriving the exhausted Lebanese people, traumatized by the Beirut port explosion, a pandemic and a debilitating financial situation, from much-needed rest.

The only option Lebanon had to protest against the Israeli violations was to appeal to the Security Council through several complaints deposited with the Council. These Israeli violations not only terrorize civilians and endanger the safety of civilian aviation, but they also violate United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 1701 (2006).

In 2020, Israeli breaches of our airspace totalled 2,022, of which 216 were by warplanes and 1,804 by reconnaissance aircraft. That is in addition to 600 territorial breaches and 520 maritime breaches in the same year. In a most recent and alarming development, the Israeli army kidnapped a Lebanese shepherd on 12 January and released him three days later.

It is high time that this august body take Israeli violations seriously and act to stop them. To ignore Lebanon's daily suffering is akin to ignoring the principles and purposes that this Organization and this Council were built upon. This contributes to neither peace nor security in Lebanon and the region.

The situation in the wider region is no better. People are deprived of their right to live in peace and security. The many protracted conflicts in the region call for a renewed momentum to move from crisis-management mode to action.

All these issues are on the Security Council table. It is high time that permanent solutions be found so that this region may live in peace and security, with the potential of its peoples realized through a new peaceful space.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, Syed Mohamad Hasrin Aidid**

At the outset, allow me to thank you, Sir, for convening this important open debate. Malaysia aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the Niger, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (see annex 14), and of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (see annex 21).

Permit me to extend my delegation's heartfelt congratulations to India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway as they begin, this morning, their important journey as the elected members of the Security Council for the term 2021-2022.

I would also like to congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland on his appointment as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. I wish to assure him of Malaysia's full support as he takes on these important responsibilities.

Malaysia would also like to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his commitment and contributions during his tenure as Special Coordinator. We wish him all the very best in his future endeavours.

The situation in Palestine and the Middle East continues to be a matter of serious concern to the international community. It is most regrettable that Israel continues its acts of provocation and violence with impunity, further exacerbating the deteriorating human-rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan.

Over the years, we have heard repeated warnings from the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator on the continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements. Year after year, these warnings seem to have fallen on deaf ears, contributing to the perpetuate Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. We also condemn acts of violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. The occupying Power must provide the necessary protection to the Palestinian population and ensure accountability for such violations.

Malaysia condemns the decision by Israel to advance plans for some 800 settlement units in the occupied West Bank and its invitation for contractors to bid on the building of 2,527 units, including in the Al-Quds City. Malaysia views these actions as a threat to peace, further undercutting the peace process working towards achieving a two-State solution. My delegation reiterates that the construction of settlements by Israel in the territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, is completely illegal and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law.

The international community must demand Israel stop all violations and illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories. Israel must be made to fully comply with all its obligations as prescribed by relevant Security Council resolutions including, resolution 2334 (2016), and international law as well as the Charter of the United Nations.

The international community cannot remain indifferent and allow continued aggression by Israel against the occupied Palestinian people. The Security Council must condemn and reject the Israeli annexation plan and must ensure that the plan is not implemented.

Malaysia's position on the question of Palestine remains clear. We will continue to advocate the resolution of the question of Palestine on the basis of an international

framework, against annexation and in support of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Malaysia remains steadfast in voicing its support for the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict. Malaysia will continue to support concrete and genuine efforts towards achieving this just and lasting solution, which we believe will greatly contribute to peace, justice and stability in the region.

Malaysia welcomes the announcement by President Mahmoud Abbas of the holding parliamentary and presidential elections, beginning in May and June 2021, respectively. We hope that the elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza will be held in the spirit of Palestinian unity and national reconciliation. We are confident that the international community will extend the necessary support for facilitating the holding of the elections.

Malaysia believes that there is no way to achieve sustainable peace without a negotiated political settlement in the form of a two-State solution. In this context, Malaysia supports the call by the international community, including by the Secretary-General, for the Middle East Quartet to find a mutually agreeable path for the parties to re-engage towards such a negotiated peaceful settlement.

Malaysia also supports the call by President Abbas to convene an international peace conference with a view to advancing a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hope that such a conference would positively contribute to bringing about an end to the illegal occupation and achieve freedom and independence for the Palestinian people.

Malaysia will continue, within our means, to provide assistance to, and support for, the Palestinian State and the Palestinian people. We reaffirm our total commitment to unwavering support for, and full solidarity with, the cause of the Palestinian people in realizing their inalienable rights to self-determination, freedom and independence. The new year ushers in an opportunity to deliver peace in the occupied territories. Malaysia will work closely with the international community and the various stakeholders in finding a peaceful, just, sustainable and lasting solution to this long-standing question.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations**

At the outset, I would like to thank Tunisia for its successful presidency of the Security Council this month.

I would also like to congratulate the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and wish him every success in fulfilling his functions. I pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his tireless efforts over the past years.

On the occasion of today's meeting, the Kingdom of Morocco reiterates its unwavering position with regard to the Palestinian question, which is based on the two-State solution, as internationally agreed, as well as its commitment to negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties as the only way to achieve a final, lasting and comprehensive settlement to this conflict.

In his capacity as Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, His Majesty King Mohammed VI continues to strongly insist on the need to preserve the special status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, respect the freedom to practice religious rites for followers of the three monotheistic religions and safeguard the Muslim character of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. I wish to recall the Al-Quds Call, signed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and His Holiness Pope Francis, during His Holiness's visit to Morocco in March 2019, aimed at promoting and enhancing the specific multi-faith character of the holy city, its spiritual dimension and its special identity.

My country reiterates its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its mandate. UNRWA plays a vital role in supporting education, health and social services for millions of Palestinian refugees and has continued to do so even in the challenging circumstances presented by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

For its part, the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, the executive field arm of the Al-Quds Committee, continues to support development plans and projects in Palestine and the holy city in order to promote the economic empowerment of the Palestinian people. The Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency seeks to spend over \$7 million for the implementation of the projects scheduled in 2021. In the same context, the structures of the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency will soon be updated to give it new impetus and enable it to pursue, under the personal supervision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the implementation of concrete plans and programmes in the fields of health, education and housing, as well as all forms of social assistance, for the benefit of the Palestinian inhabitants of Al-Quds.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the need to renew direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis so as to find a solution that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and contributes to the establishment of security, peace and prosperity in the Middle East region.

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations, Neville Gertze**

I would like to congratulate the President of the Security Council on Tunisia's assumption of the presidency for the month of January 2021 and thank him for organizing today's quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, former Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his service over the past five years. During his tenure, Mr. Mladenov ably attempted to bring about a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question. In the same vein, I welcome Mr. Tor Wennesland, the newly appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and wish him every success. I can assure Mr. Wennesland of Namibia's support during his term.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (annex 21) and that of the Permanent Representative of Senegal, in which he addresses the Council in his capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (annex 25).

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has ravaged the world for almost a year now. While the pandemic has impacted all corners of the globe, it has more drastically affected those that were already vulnerable or at risk. Nowhere is that more visible than in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Palestinian economy, already fragile before the pandemic, has dived into a deeper crisis. Inequalities have grown, and the humanitarian situation has worsened.

All the while, at the height of the pandemic, Israel continues its settlement-expansion policy and the destruction of Palestinian homes and structures, displacing men, women and children. Most recently, the Israeli authorities have advanced plans for some 800 settlement units, most of which are located deep inside the occupied West Bank. Namibia expresses its deep concern at this decision.

As the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General recently stated,

“The Secretary-General reiterates that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.”

These actions represent a grave obstacle to the two-State solution, and we urge Israel to halt and reverse such decisions.

Namibia wishes to express its concern at the current vaccine programme being rolled out by Israeli authorities. The international community should continue to remind Israel, as an occupying Power, of its obligations under international law to ensure public health in the occupied territories. There must be an equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the occupied territories. As the President of the General Assembly stated in his presentation of his priorities for 2021 to the United Nations membership last week, vaccines for all must be a reality.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The provision of vital services represents a stabilizing element in a region that continues to be the victim of violence. The essential emergency assistance that the Agency has provided to help Palestinian refugees confront the COVID-19 pandemic has only

reinforced UNRWA's importance. Namibia remains concerned about the financial challenges that the Agency is confronting, especially during this time of global pandemic.

Namibia welcomes the 15 January presidential decree issued by President Abbas on the holding of legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections later this year, starting in May. These elections will mark a crucial step towards Palestinian unity. Namibia joins with the Secretary-General in hoping

“that the holding of the elections will contribute to restarting a process towards a negotiated two-State solution based on the pre-1967 lines, and in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law”.

I also wish to reiterate Namibia's support for the call made by President Abbas for the holding of an international conference under the auspices of the Middle East Quartet, with the expanded participation of regional players to help advance the peace process.

It has been one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread around the world. At this time, we have seen the best and the worst of humankind. In the Middle East, we saw glimmers of cooperation between the two sides. As we begin a new year, with the hope and optimism that the distribution of the various vaccines brings, let us once again encourage Israelis and Palestinians to return to the tables of negotiation and achieve a historic agreement leading to Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. Namibia will continue to stand with the Palestinian people and advocate their fundamental right to self-determination and independence in all forums.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We are grateful for the convening of today's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We are also grateful for Mr. Tor Wennesland's lucid briefing. Knowing his great qualities, we wish him every success in managing this delicate task and assure him of our full support. We also reiterate our appreciation for the always constructive and thoughtful work of his predecessor, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov.

Peru is closely following the developments related to the Palestinian question, given its importance for the stability of the Middle East and, by extension, that of the world. We view with hope the progress made in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process, which has led to the announcement of the holding of legislative and presidential elections in 2021, the first such elections in 15 years. We consider this to be a fundamental step towards strengthening the legitimacy of Palestinian institutions, which will lay the foundations for a renewed dialogue with Israel. We look forward to the Security Council's necessary full support.

We also welcome the resumption of cooperation between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, which has made it possible to normalize the receipt of tax revenues that Israel collects on the Authority's behalf, as well as the restoration of diplomatic relations between Israel and Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and the Sudan, which we hope will have positive repercussions for peace and security in the region.

However, we note that these developments, if they are to remain favourable, must necessarily and urgently be accompanied by an end to the escalating practices of settlements, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, which seriously undermine the two-State solution and contravene the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016). We are particularly concerned about the settlement-expansion plans in Givat Hamatos, East Jerusalem, and about the fact that 2020 was the second-highest year in terms of demolition of Palestinian structures since 2009.

We must also continue to condemn the recurrence of indiscriminate attacks on civilians by Hamas and other radical Palestinian actors, the disproportionate Israeli responses, the unflagging confrontational rhetoric and the serious episodes of settler-related violence in the West Bank. We expect concrete signs of restraint and commitment to peace from both sides, and it is essential, in the immediate term, that the parties comply with the comprehensive ceasefire called for by Secretary-General António Guterres.

In these circumstances, we reaffirm our commitment to the only solution that we consider viable and consistent with international law: that of two States within internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the borders in force until 1967, and which must also lead to the determination of the final status of Jerusalem.

We note with dismay the continuing deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza as a result of its isolation and the lack of opportunity there, a situation that the coronavirus disease pandemic has only exacerbated. In this regard, we commend the outstanding work of the United Nations and its agencies in providing basic medical supplies and transferring patients out of Gaza. We hope that these efforts will be complemented by non-discriminatory access to vaccination for the

Palestinian population, in compliance with Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In this regard, we underline the critical state of the finances of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the need to provide the Agency with a stable and predictable flow of resources so that its crucial assistance work remains uninterrupted.

I would conclude by emphasizing the central role that the Quartet is called upon to play in efforts to restart a peace process, alongside a number of countries that have historically been involved in this process. In line with its difficult responsibility of ensuring international peace and security, the Security Council must also be able to reach minimum consensus and speak out when the situation on the ground so warrants.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Representative Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, we would like to congratulate you on your efforts during the Tunisian presidency of the Security Council this month. We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, for his briefing, and congratulate him on taking up the position. We wish him every success in the huge task of making progress in the peace process.

Such progress is a goal to which the international community consistently aspires and on which it places great emphasis. Today's meeting is an opportunity to reaffirm that common goal. Negotiations between the two sides, Palestinian and Israeli, are the only way to end the conflict, which the Council has had before it for decades and which has caused immeasurable suffering.

An end to the conflict, through a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question, would serve the interests of both parties and of stability in the region in general. That requires a settlement that adheres to the principle of a two-State solution on the basis of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions, and conforms to the Arab Peace Initiative, by establishing a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital living side by side with Israel in security and peace. A settlement would also require an end to the occupation of Arab territory and illegal settlements, a just solution to the refugee issue, and refraining from any acts that would undermine the two-State solution, including attempts to annex lands, seize or destroy property, violate holy places, implement policies to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, and the rest of the occupying Power's practices that violate international law and United Nations resolutions. As we have stressed on previous occasions, any arrangements not based on these references will not bring about the desired peace.

The State of Qatar continues to stand firm in support of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people under international law. The State of Qatar supports national reconciliation between our Palestinian brothers. It also continues to provide humanitarian support to the fraternal Palestinian people in order to alleviate the humanitarian crises and economic difficulties they face and create an environment conducive to peace. That includes its ongoing support for improving the situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been deteriorating as a result of the suffocating blockade.

It has been almost a full decade since the onset of the crisis in Syria. The fraternal Syrian people have endured, and continue to endure, untold human suffering and have been subjected to grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. They deserve a chance to overcome these tragedies and fulfil their legitimate aspirations. We must therefore support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to find a solution to the crisis through a meaningful political process that brings about a political transition in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué and implementation of all elements of resolution 2254 (2015), including preserving the unity, sovereignty and independence of the Syrian Arab Republic. There can be no doubt that military solutions are in conflict with that goal. All violations and crimes against humanity must be condemned, and justice and accountability must be emphasized regardless of who is responsible.

In Libya, recent developments have provided the fraternal Libyan people with a ray of hope for achieving the peace, security and stability they aspire to and deserve,

and putting an end to violations, human suffering and difficult economic conditions. We welcome the steps taken towards implementing the ceasefire agreement, and the launch of and progress made in the Libyan political dialogue and the Libyan economic dialogue. We call for the national interest to be put first, the political process to be activated, elections to be held, and a comprehensive settlement to be reached that will preserve the unity, sovereignty and independence of Libya. We commend the efforts of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya in that regard. We also welcome the appointment of Ján Kubiš as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. Qatar will support him fully in his new post.

We have repeatedly stressed the commitment of Qatar to reducing tensions and approaching crisis resolution through dialogue in accordance with the principles of peaceful settlement of disputes. We have also highlighted the priority that Qatar places on the quest to realize unity in the Gulf, to restore the social fabric of the peoples of the region, and achieve their aspirations for greater solidarity, growth and stability. In that regard, we are pleased to note that the State of Qatar welcomes the Ula Statement released on 5 January on the margins of the forty-first Summit of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, which was attended by His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. That meeting came at this crucial moment as a continuation of the process of joint action within the Gulf, Arab and Islamic framework, putting higher interests first in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship and fraternity among peoples and establish the principles of good-neighbourliness and mutual respect. The Ula Statement is complementary to the sincere efforts led by the departed Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, whose mantle has passed to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the current Emir of Kuwait. Qatar also appreciates the efforts of the United States of America to bring views closer together.

In conclusion, more than ever before, our region needs to bring an end to crises and establish frameworks for collective security and fruitful cooperation for the benefit of its peoples, especially given the persistence of the common challenges that face all of us without exception, including the global health crisis. For its part, the State of Qatar will continue to work sincerely towards creating the conditions conducive to that end for the benefit of its people and the peoples of the region as a whole.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

My delegation thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, former Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his efforts and dedication for over five years to bring peace and stability to the region and wishes him much success in all his future endeavours. We also welcome the appointment of Mr. Tor Wennesland as the new Special Coordinator and reaffirm our full support.

The Republic of Korea encourages the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to resume meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions as well as international law and bilateral agreements. We further express our support for efforts to resume credible peace talks, including those of the Middle East Quartet, and join the Secretary-General in calling for practical steps to enable the parties to re-engage.

We welcome the respective agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of the Sudan and the Kingdom of Morocco. We hope those developments will contribute to easing tensions and enhancing stability in the region.

The Republic of Korea expresses its grave concern about all acts of violence against civilians, expresses serious concern about the reports of hostilities continuing over the past few months and joins in the international call for an immediate end to violence and incitement.

The Republic of Korea emphasizes the importance of respecting resolution 2334 (2016) and international law. My delegation believes that confidence-building measures are urgently required to create a more favourable environment for dialogue between the parties to achieve sustainable peace. We encourage Israelis and Palestinians to intensify efforts to foster dialogue and cooperation.

We welcome the presidential decree issued by President Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections and reiterate that unity and consensus among the Palestinian people are critical to achieving peace and an independent, sovereign and democratic State.

The Republic of Korea reaffirms our full support for the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine, particularly in the light of the difficult challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and also recognizes its efforts to improve its own accountability. In 2020, the Republic of Korea provided \$1 million to support UNRWA's humanitarian activities in the areas of primary and vocational education, health care and relief services, and around \$4 million to support Palestinians, including through in-kind donations of COVID-19 test kits, as well as bilateral development cooperation projects.

The Republic of Korea, a staunch supporter of efforts by the international community and the Security Council to create peace and stability in the region, reaffirms its commitment to continuing its constructive role to that end.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Abdallah Al-Mouallimi**

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, for the assumption by Tunisia of the Presidency of the Security Council for this month and express my country's appreciation for your outstanding efforts and constructive role on the Council. You have brought outstanding and positive enhancements to the work of the Council, and we wish you all success.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank the previous United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nikolai Mladenov, for his tireless efforts during his tenure, and to welcome his successor, Tor Wennesland and with him well in his new post.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is founded on a great legacy of principles and constant elements that underpin its foreign policy, at the top of which is its permanent ambition to achieve peaceful solutions to conflicts, while preventing their escalation by undertaking mediation efforts in order to achieve that noble objective. The Kingdom affirms its commitment to peace as a strategic choice, its concern for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and integrity of Arab lands, and its refusal to accept anything that harms the stability of the region.

The resolution of the Palestinian question is the greatest challenge facing regional stability, security, prosperity and development. In addition, regional forces are playing a destructive role that poses a major threat to security and stability. Those forces are pursuing their expansionist agendas and seeking to extend their influence without regard to the adverse consequences of their hostile policies on the States of the region, through the use of armed militias, terrorist groups and sectarian divisions. Unless these issues are addressed, the region will be unable to move forward to a better future for its peoples, who are suffering the agonies of divisions, conflict and war.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia affirms its consistent approach and firmly established positions with regard to the Palestinian people. That issue is at the top of the Kingdom's priorities and concerns. The Kingdom stands with the Palestinian people in favour of a just and comprehensive solution in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the 2002 Arab Summit Conference, which calls for full withdrawal by Israel from all Arab territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

My country's Government condemns Israel's decision to approve the construction of 800 new settlement units in the West Bank; it reiterates its categorical rejection of that measure as a fresh violation of internationally recognized resolutions, a threat to peace, and a step that undermines the two-State solution. It is clear from this step that Israel is continuing its aggression against the Palestinian people with no regard to the suffering being undergone by generation upon generation of Palestinians, from land appropriation, violation of dignity and deprivation of freedoms to displacement and ultimately attempt to make these hostile policies legitimate.

The Kingdom reiterates its call on the international community and the Security Council to stand firm against these Israeli policies and to move the peace process forward to reach an agreement that restores the Palestinian people's

legitimate rights. A just and comprehensive peace is the strategic choice, not policies of fait accompli and brute force.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns the cowardly terrorist attack on Aden airport timed to coincide with the arrival of a plane carrying members of the new Government of Yemen. It also condemns the terrorist attack on Ma'ashiq Palace. These terrorist acts are aimed not only at the Yemeni Government, but squarely at the hopes and aspirations of the brotherly Yemeni people. They are an attempt to undermine the Riyadh Agreement, which Yemenis adopted to unite ranks, restore normality, security and stability, and reach a comprehensive political solution in Yemen.

My Government supports the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to reach a full ceasefire and begin a comprehensive political process to reach the desired resolution based on the three references, which are the Gulf Initiative and its implementing mechanisms, the outcomes of the Yemeni National Dialogue, and resolution 2216 (2015). The Iranian-backed Houthi insurrectionist militia bears responsibility for the repercussions of the Yemeni crisis and the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen. The militia favours narrow political interests over the interests of the Yemeni people and regional security and stability. It serves the interests of the Iranian regime's expansionism. We call on the Security Council to stand firmly against Houthi violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions and repeated attacks against the territory and population of Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom is also continuing its efforts to end the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people and support the Yemeni economy. It has put forward numerous initiatives and measures to support and improve economic and humanitarian conditions in Yemen. Since the beginning of the crisis, the Kingdom has provided Yemen with some \$17 billion.

By contrast, Iran continues to pose a major threat to stability all over the region, including in Yemen. Its intervention in Yemen has directly contributed to the obstruction of United Nations efforts to reach a political solution. It has provided all kinds of support to the insurrectionist Houthi militia in order to stir up divisions and undermine the security of the region. Perhaps the best indication of that is its appointment of a military man who is a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as its ambassador to the Houthi insurrectionist militia, in a flagrant violation of resolution 2216 (2015), the relevant international laws and diplomatic norms.

My country's Government calls for the international community to cooperate to address the threat posed by the policies of Iran to international peace and security with a comprehensive approach that includes not only its nuclear programme but also its expansionist and aggressive activities — including its military and logistical support to terrorist militias — and brings an end to its activities that threaten the security and stability in the region in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and other Arab States. Failure to confront these activities will encourage Iran to move forward with its destructive policies. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes in the principle of dialogue and the peaceful resolution of problems and disputes. However, it believes that the calls for dialogue should be accompanied by a halt to threats and hostile acts on the ground.

My country's Government also hopes that the signing of the Ula Statement will turn over a new leaf for the security and stability of the region and its peoples. That statement stressed the close and deep-rooted ties among the members of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf, which are founded on the Islamic faith and a common destiny.

Annex 44**Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

We thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate.

South Africa is gravely concerned about the recent pronouncements by the Government of Israel to further advance its settlement plans in the occupied West Bank. It is widely acknowledged by the United Nations membership and the Security Council that Israeli settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law, pursuant to resolution 2334 (2016), adopted with near unanimity.

Not only are those actions in flagrant violation of adopted General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international law, they also pose one of the gravest impediments to peace between the parties and undermine the possibility of a two-State solution. They further illustrate blatant disregard by Israel for both the long-standing peace process and the tireless efforts of the international community to resolve this decades-long intractable conflict.

We implore the Security Council to take action against this illegal act, and we call for the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) and all previous resolutions on the question of Palestine. Time and time again we have witnessed gross double standards with regard to impunity and accountability on this issue and on other matters related to Israeli violations of Security Council resolutions, such as the matters of Lebanon and the Golan Heights. This undermines the credibility of the Council.

We urge the Council to help safeguard the rights of the Palestinian people, protect their land and property and provide the necessary impartial support in order to achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict. This open wound and blight on the conscience of the Council and the international community has been allowed to fester, in contrast to progress made in a number of other conflict areas around the world, with the call by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire and reprieve during this challenging time as we confront a global pandemic. Instead, in addition to the burden of occupation and oppression, the people of Palestine must now also endure the further adverse impact of coronavirus disease.

South Africa welcomes the decree issued by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections in Palestine later this year. This demonstrates the will of the Palestinians people to endure as a democracy despite the inordinate challenges it faces. We furthermore welcome the progress made in the reconciliation talks between the various political formations in Palestine and firmly believe that those important steps illustrate Palestinians' commitment to peace and statehood.

In conclusion, we urge the Security Council and the international community to support efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel, within internationally recognized borders and based on 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and internationally agreed parameters.

Annex 45**Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Syria, Bashar Al-Ja'afari**

[Original: Arabic]

Allow me once again to express our great pleasure at the assumption by our sister State Tunisia of the presidency of the Security Council and our great appreciation for your successful and distinguished management of the Council's business for this month.

I also congratulate Tor Wennesland on his appointment as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and wish him success in this extremely sensitive and important task.

Some 54 years have passed since Israel occupied Palestinian territory, the occupied Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a Farmlands in southern Lebanon. Despite horrendous suffering in the course of those long decades, the Israeli occupation and the threat it poses to peace and security in the Middle East and the world as a whole persist to this very day. That is a clear indication that the Security Council has failed to carry out its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security by compelling Israel to respect its resolutions, comply with the will of the international community and end its occupation, which is the principal factor that perpetuates tension and conflicts in our region.

For 54 years and counting, the Security Council has failed to call the Israeli occupation authorities to account for their hostile acts, violations of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and systematic and repressive criminal practices against our people in occupied Arab territories. That is due to the protective umbrella provided to Israel by certain Western States that are permanent members of the Security Council, in particular the United States of America, which has shirked its obligations and responsibilities, which include upholding the Charter and maintaining international peace and security, and turned its membership into a platform for protecting and prolonging the Israeli occupation and shielding its representatives from any accountability or punishment for their war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights.

That is not all. We saw an unprecedented bias on the part of the previous United States Administration towards the Israeli occupation and its various schemes. It approved provocative and illegal unilateral measures intended to alter the political and legal status quo in occupied Arab territories. However, those United States actions and decisions have been met with ringing condemnation from the Syrian Arab Republic and the overwhelming majority of Member States. Trump's decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan are nothing more than unilateral acts coming from a party that has neither the status nor the political, legal or moral capacity to decide the fates of peoples or dispose of lands that are an integral part of the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and occupied Palestine.

The contempt of the Israeli occupation authorities for international law and internationally recognized resolutions has grown to an unprecedented pitch. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to intensify their attacks on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, in flagrant violation of resolution 350 (1974), on the Separation of Forces Agreement between the two sides. Recent days have seen an increase in the frequency of Israeli attacks on my country. The most recent occurred on Friday, 22 January 2021, when Israel perpetrated a fresh attack near the city of Hama, resulting in the deaths of a father, a mother and two children, injury to

four other citizens of the same family and the destruction of a number of homes of innocent civilians.

This criminal aggression is just one more in a string of over 50 Israeli attacks in less than a year that resulted in loss of life among a large number of civilians and destruction of property. At the same time, the Israeli occupation authorities continue to practice their escalating State terrorism. They have stepped up their systematic and gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Syrian Golan, which has been occupied since 1967, with the aim of entrenching their control and imposing their will. Their crimes include settlement building, racial discrimination, arbitrary arrest, torture, displacement, demographic alteration, theft of the Golan's natural resources and attempts to impose Israeli citizenship through threats and blackmail, including by pressuring Syrian students coming from their studies in Europe to spend their holidays in the occupied Syrian Golan to accept Israeli citizenship by threatening to prevent them from returning to Europe to complete their studies if they refuse.

In that same vein, the occupation authorities recently set up facilities in the so-called "Trump Plateau" settlement, located on land belonging to the village of Qunaytirah in the occupied Syrian Golan. During December last year and the current month, preparations were made to move 20 Israeli settler families into the new settlement as part of a policy of settlement expansion coupled with erasing the identity of the Syrian Arab Golan. We would also be remiss not to mention the appropriation by the occupation authorities of our people's land and property in the occupied Syrian Golan for giant wind turbines. Our people, who are suffering under the occupation, opposed that scheme through a large-scale popular movement that the occupying forces have met with unprecedented violence that has already resulted in a number of injuries and arrests.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic calls on the international community to pressure Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately and without delay reopen the Qunaytirah crossing, which is the artery that connects our people in the occupied Syrian Golan to their motherland and the lung through which they breathe.

The Israeli occupation forces' policy of arbitrary arrest and sham trials is an integral part of a catalogue of Israeli crimes and human rights violations against Syrian civilian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan stretching back over the more than five decades that Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan. Syria reiterates that it rejects the arbitrary and unjust ruling issued by the Israeli occupation forces on 10 June 2020 handing down a sentence of three years' imprisonment to the patriotic activist Nihal Suleiman Al-Maqt, sister of the released prisoner Sidqi Al-Maqt, who is from the town of Majdal Shams in the occupied Syrian Golan. We note that the occupation forces recently demanded that Ms. Al-Maqt pay a sizable monetary fine. They also changed her prison sentence to include long daily hours of hard labour. The Israeli occupation authorities sent a patrol to arrest Ms. Al-Maqt and take her to the location where the hard labour was to be served.

Last August, Ms. Al-Maqt was forcibly transferred to a place that effectively constituted her prison inside occupied Palestine, away from her native occupied Syrian Golan, with the aim of separating her from her land and her family. The Israeli occupation authorities are also subjecting Ms. Al-Maqt to arbitrary and brutal practices aimed at pressuring her, breaking her will and subjugating her to the occupying Power. The same thing happened to her brother the released prisoner Sidqi Al-Maqt, the Syrian Mandela, whom the Israeli occupation authorities held in the bowels of their prisons for 30 years.

On 12 January 2021, on behalf of my country's Government, I wrote to His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations to enlist his good offices to help free Ms. Nihal Suleiman Al-Maqt and enable her to return to her family and land in the village of Majdal Shams in the occupied Syrian Golan. I sent a similar letter to Mr. Tor Wennesland, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We look forward to receiving their responses.

In that regard, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call on the Security Council to take urgent action to ensure the implementation of resolution 497 (1981) and compel the Israeli occupation entity to end its illegal settlement practices and repressive measures against our people in the occupied Syrian Golan and withdraw from the entire occupied Golan to the line of 4 June 1967.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic repeatedly expressed its strong protests against the biased and non-objective approach taken by Nickolay Mladenov, the previous United Nations Special Coordinator for the Peace Process, in his periodic briefings to the Security Council. He insisted on ignoring the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, the latest aggressive criminal practices being engaged in by the Israeli occupation authorities and the illegal decisions of the United States Administration.

Allow me to take this opportunity to invite Mr. Wennesland, the new United Nations Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to acknowledge the mistakes of his predecessor, correct his course and stick impartially, professionally and transparently to his mandate. We hope that he will make the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the escalating Israeli practices against our people there a priority of his mandate and efforts.

In conclusion, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that, in order to ensure stability in the Middle East and preserve the credibility of the United Nations, measures must be taken to implement all international resolutions aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan, and compelling Israel to withdraw to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981) and 2334 (2016). Syria also reiterates that the Golan is an integral part of Syrian territory and that it will work to recover it by all means guaranteed by international law and practice, because its right to do so is eternal and cannot be extinguished by the passage of time.

My country's Government underlines its support for the right of the Palestinian people to determine their own destiny and establish an independent State on all their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right of refugees to return to their homes, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948. My country also stresses that any decisions, measures or deals that are inconsistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions or fail to safeguard the established rights of the Palestinians are not remotely viable and should be rejected in form and substance. My Government renews its call to grant the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations.

Annex 46**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Tor Wennesland on the assumption of his role as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. We trust that, with his extensive experience on this file, Mr. Wennesland will make a valuable contribution to efforts towards reaching a negotiated two-State solution. Turkey will support Mr. Wennesland in his endeavours to that end.

Unfortunately, recent developments on the ground do not bode well for the prospects for ending half a century of occupation. Last year was marked not only by the devastating impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, with dire consequences for Palestinians, but also by record levels of violations of resolution 2334 (2016), rendering countless Palestinians homeless through the systematic demolitions of their homes. The number of structures demolished in the occupied territories and the number of Palestinians displaced as a result have reached their highest level of the past four years. At a time when we most need solidarity, the unabated continuation of such oppressive policies is disheartening.

The ability of the Palestinians to fight the pandemic has been undermined by Israel's continued disregard for its commitments to halt demolitions and cease targeting critical facilities during the COVID-19 crisis. We are also gravely concerned about reports of international human rights organizations that Israel does not provide COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians in the occupied territories. We would like to remind Israel that, as the occupying Power, it is responsible for the health of the Palestinian population in those territories.

As documented in United Nations reports, Israel stepped up its unilateral actions in the occupied Palestinian territories at unprecedented levels, including through the expansion of the illegal settlements. In 2020 alone, Israel approved or made plans for more than 12,000 housing units. Facts on the ground speak for themselves — Israel clearly did not abandon its annexation plans after the so-called normalization agreements.

The latest example of Israel's illegal steps as the occupying Power, in complete disregard for international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, was the approval of nearly 800 new illegal settlements in the West Bank. This worrisome development was denounced by the Secretary-General and the European Union. Soon after, Israel announced tenders for the construction of new illegal settlements consisting of over 2,500 housing units — once again blatantly disregarding the international community.

This series of actions amounts to a methodical plan of making a future contiguous Palestinian State physically impossible, effectively obliterating the two-State vision. Israel also continues its attempts to change the status of Jerusalem, in violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. These actions undermine the international parameters for a viable solution.

In order to find a just solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict on the basis of internationally recognized parameters, it is incumbent upon the Council to stop Israel from further expanding its illegal settlements. The international community must clearly demonstrate that Israel's illegal actions will not be tolerated. Israel has been operating a largely cost-free occupation for 53 years. If impunity continues to

be indulged, it is unrealistic to expect anything other than the expansion of illegal settlements for a future de jure annexation claim.

Turkey supports a two-State solution that would lead to the establishment of an independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The United Nations needs to take action for the resumption of negotiations with a view to revitalizing the peace process. We support the call of President Abbas to the Secretary-General for the holding of an international conference to launch a genuine peace process.

Achieving intra-Palestinian reconciliation is an urgent necessity for a negotiated two-State solution. We therefore appreciate the progress made in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process and the will to implement the agreement reached during the negotiations that we hosted in Istanbul with regard to the holding of elections. We are pleased to see that President Abbas has issued a presidential decree on legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections in Palestine. That is a crucial step towards Palestinian unity. We urge the United Nations and the international community to support Palestinian reconciliation and the elections.

Measures taken by Israel to consolidate its unlawful annexation of Jerusalem and its surroundings threaten the legal status of the city, as well as its demographic composition and its historically multicultural and multireligious character. The international community should refrain from taking steps that are tantamount to condoning those illegal actions. We are concerned about the intention of third countries to open an embassy in Jerusalem or relocate their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The final status of Jerusalem will be part and parcel of the comprehensive solution to the conflict. Opening an embassy in Jerusalem constitutes a clear violation of international law, including United Nations resolutions. We note that resolution 478 (1980) calls for the withdrawal of all diplomatic missions from Jerusalem, and that General Assembly resolution ES-10/19 demands, in its paragraphs 2 and 1, respectively,

“that all States comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, and not recognize any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions”

and

“calls upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem, pursuant to Council resolution 478 (1980)”.

The situation in Gaza continues to be a stain on humankind. The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip has entered its thirteenth year. The latest report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on the cost of the blockade (see A/75/310) reveals staggering economic losses. The cumulative cost of the blockade, together with the military operations, amounts to \$16.7 billion — equivalent to six times the gross domestic product of Gaza. Today Gaza has the world’s highest unemployment rate, with half of its population living below the poverty line. This devastating economic downturn is compounded by a colossal 43 per cent growth in both population and population density. Gaza’s population density, dilapidated infrastructure and chronic shortage of medical supplies and hospital beds significantly increase the risk of a major COVID-19 outbreak there.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to operate in extremely difficult circumstances, and the challenges it faces have further increased due to COVID-19. As a result of the funding shortfall, the Agency was forced to curtail critical vaccination campaigns

and withhold staff salaries. Since the income forecast for UNRWA has not improved in 2021, there is a growing risk of more drastic measures to prevent a financial collapse of the Agency. UNRWA is indispensable for providing vital health, relief and emergency assistance to millions. During COVID-19, the services provided by UNRWA have become a matter of survival for many Palestinians. It is our collective and moral duty to step up our support to the Agency.

Revitalizing the Middle East peace process is essential if we are to fulfil our long-overdue promise to the Palestinian people — life with dignity. It is also critical for the stability of our region. The international community has a key role to play. We must collectively help revitalize negotiations for a two-State solution in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations**

[Original: English and Arabic]

The United Arab Emirates is pleased to submit this statement to the United Nations on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

The Arab Group welcomes the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and wishes him success in his new position. Additionally, the Arab Group expresses its appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, former Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his tireless efforts over the years.

The Arab Group values the efforts of the Republic of Tunisia, President of the Security Council for this month, in seeking to make today's discussion different from previous debates by focusing on mobilizing international support to achieve a peaceful and just solution to the Palestinian question.

Despite the international community's efforts, over decades, to support the parties in reaching a peaceful, just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, those efforts have repeatedly faltered, causing greater suffering for civilians and escalating tensions and violence. Moreover, prospects to make progress towards a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders are dim.

In that connection, we recall the signing of the Oslo Accords, the establishment of the Middle East Quartet, the launching of the Arab Peace Initiative, the adoption of hundreds of resolutions and the dozens of international summits and conferences convened.

It is therefore imperative for the international community to seriously consider how to build new international momentum to break the deadlock in the political process and how to relaunch a credible peace process based on international resolutions and internationally agreed terms of reference, which remains indispensable.

In that context, the Arab Group reiterates the need to put an end to the illegal practices that threaten the achievement of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and to create a suitable environment to return to serious negotiations, within a specific time frame, in order to end the Israeli occupation and to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.

That requires the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016), and the cessation of illegal measures that impede the peace process, foremost of which is the unprecedented level of building and expansion of settlements. It further requires Israel to completely abandon all plans to annex Palestinian lands due to their destructive impact on the two-State solution.

In that regard, the Arab Group condemns Israel's recent announcement to move forward with plans to build thousands of settlement units in the occupied Palestinian territory. We call for the end of the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property, the forcible displacement of the population, the targeting of civilians by the occupying forces and settlers, the unjust siege of the Gaza Strip, the obstruction of the movement of Palestinian citizens and the arbitrary arrest of thousands of Palestinians. The Arab Group rejects Israeli's unilateral measures to change the identity of Jerusalem, in violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. We stress the need to preserve the historical and legal status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Moreover, while stressing the centrality of the Palestine issue to Arab countries and peoples, the Arab Group reaffirms its support for President Mahmoud Abbas' initiative and his call on the Secretary-General to work in coordination with the Middle East Quartet and the Security Council to convene an international conference that would mobilize the efforts of international stakeholders and the countries of the region to activate an international multilateral mechanism, under the auspices of the United Nations, to sponsor the peace process in the Middle East.

In the context of calls for strengthening coordination between the Security Council and the League of Arab States, the Arab Group supports Mr. Mladenov's words during his last briefing to the Council, on 21 December 2020:

“The Middle East Quartet — alongside Arab partners — and Israeli and Palestinian leaders must work together to return to the path of meaningful negotiations.” (*S/2020/1275, annex I*)

We reiterate that the Arab Group is ready to work with the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question in keeping with the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Arab Group also expresses its concern about the deteriorating humanitarian, social and economic conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, which have worsened due to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The latest United Nations assessment of humanitarian needs shows that about 47 per cent of the Palestinian population is currently in need of assistance. Accordingly, the Arab Group stresses the need to support the Palestinian people in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including by supporting United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Furthermore, the Arab Group stresses the need to provide COVID-19 vaccines to the Palestinian people, as well as the necessary medical supplies and equipment to combat the pandemic. In that context, the Arab Group affirms Israel's responsibility as an occupying Power.

Moreover, the Arab Group stresses the importance of finalizing the Palestinian national reconciliation process and enabling the Palestinian Government to fully assume its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip fully. In that context, the Arab Group welcomes the presidential decree, issued by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, to hold legislative and presidential elections, in addition to elections for the National Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization, this year.

We hope that the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet and the international community will support those elections by ensuring that Israel will not obstruct them, especially in East Jerusalem. We further stress the importance of supporting the political participation of women and youth throughout the electoral process. The Arab Group also supports Palestine's full membership in the United Nations in order to enhance its legal and international standing.

In conclusion, the Arab Group calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities of maintaining international peace and security and ending the Israeli occupation of all Palestinian and Arab territories. The Arab Group affirms that there is no alternative to the two-State solution and the independence of a sovereign Palestinian State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.