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New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Kamboj (India)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. Costa Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. Olmedo
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Ireland	Mr. Mythen
Kenya	Mr. Kimani
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: I devote my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the twenty-fourth report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The Secretary-General's written report, which members have already received, covers the period between 21 September to 7 December 2022.

Before turning to developments subsequent to the written report, I would like to reiterate my deep concern over the high levels of violence we have witnessed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel over the past several months. Clashes, protests attacks, Israeli security operations, including in Area A, and settler-related violence have continued. To date in 2022, over 150 Palestinians and more than 20 Israelis have been killed in the West Bank and Israel, the highest numbers of fatalities in years.

Regrettably, in the period following the submission of the written report, violence has continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Since 8 December, six Palestinians, including two children, have been killed by Israeli security forces. Of those, four were killed during search-and-arrest operations in Jenin, one during an exchange of fire following an alleged shooting attack near Ofra settlement and one was killed in the context of alleged stone-throwing.

I will now turn to several observations concerning the implementation of the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016) during the reporting period.

Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply concerning. Settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law.

They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State.

While the reporting period saw no advancements of housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the total number of settlement housing units advanced in 2022 remains high, albeit slightly lower than in 2021. Overall, during the year, in Area C some 4,800 units were advanced, as compared with 5,400 in 2021, while tenders dropped from 1,800 in 2021 to 150 in 2022. Moreover, in occupied East Jerusalem, the number of housing units advanced more than tripled from the previous year — from 900 units in 2021 to 3,100 units in 2022, with tenders doubling from 200 to 400. I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activities immediately.

I am also deeply concerned by the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures. I am alarmed in particular by the demolition of a donor-funded school in Masafer Yatta and the stated intention of Israeli authorities to demolish additional structures in the herding communities of that area, which would have a significant humanitarian toll if implemented. I call upon the Government of Israel to end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property, prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and approve plans that would enable Palestinians to build legally and address their development needs.

I am gravely concerned by the sharp increase in violence against civilians on both sides, which exacerbates mistrust and undermines a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. The year 2022 has tragically witnessed the killing of 44 Palestinian children and one Israeli child. Those include the killing by Israeli security forces of a 16-year-old boy in the context of alleged stone-throwing in the Aboud community, near Ramallah, on 8 December, and of a 15-year-old Palestinian girl in the context of a search-and-arrest operation in Jenin on 11 December that involved an exchange of fire between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. According to an initial Israel Defense Forces investigation, the girl was shot unintentionally and was not involved in hostilities. Children must never

be the target of violence, used or put in harm's way. Also disturbing are the continued killings of Palestinians by Israeli security forces in incidents in which they did not appear to present an imminent threat to life. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

The increase in the number of Israelis killed or injured by Palestinians, including in bombings and shooting attacks, is also alarming. The violence must stop, and all perpetrators must be held accountable. I condemn all acts of terrorism, which must be rejected and condemned by all. I call on political, religious and community leaders on all sides to help to calm the situation, avoid spreading inflammatory rhetoric and speak up against those seeking to incite and escalate the situation.

I am increasingly concerned by the fragility of the current political and security dynamics, particularly in the occupied West Bank, including in Jerusalem. The deepening occupation, the increase in violence, including terrorism, and the absence of a political horizon have empowered extremists and are eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis alike that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.

Simultaneously, the Palestinian Authority is facing mounting economic and institutional challenges, compounded by the constraints of the occupation, the absence of serious reforms and unclear prospects for donor support.

In Gaza, the situation remains fragile, and the risk of escalation persists. Efforts by the United Nations and regional and international partners, including Egypt and Qatar, to improve Palestinian lives, as well as measures by Israel to ease some movement and access restrictions and facilitate more economic activity, have enabled the ceasefire to hold. There are currently more than 18,000 permits for Palestinian residents of Gaza to work or do business in Israel, the highest number since 2007. The volume of goods exiting Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel increased by nearly 50 per cent in 2022. While progress has been made, restrictions and delays continue to negatively affect humanitarian and development efforts, as well as important sectors of the economy. More needs to be done to alleviate the humanitarian situation and enable the economy to grow.

Ultimately, solving Gaza's challenges will require political solutions, including a return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to the Strip, a full lifting of Israeli closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009), and an end to the militant build-up.

As commodity prices spike, humanitarian needs and costs are rising across the occupied Palestinian territories. The World Food Programme (WFP) in particular is facing a significant decline in bilateral financial support, putting at risk its ability to maintain critical food and cash assistance to more than 400,000 of the most vulnerable food-insecure people across the occupied Palestinian territories. The WFP needs \$35 million over the next six months to be able to continue its ongoing support.

I also remain seriously concerned about the financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is putting at risk the delivery of essential services to Palestine refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the region. As the West Bank has witnessed the highest level of violence in years, UNRWA remains one of the most significant stabilizing elements in the lives of thousands of Palestinians. I reiterate my urgent call to provide UNRWA with the funds needed to fully deliver on its General Assembly mandate.

As I told the Council in my briefing last month (see S/PV.9203), seeking to freeze this conflict or manage it in perpetuity are not viable options. There is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict. In line with the recommendation that I made to the Council in November, I urge the parties, along with States of the region and the broader international community, to take concrete steps that will change the negative trajectory on the ground and have an immediate impact on Palestinian and Israeli lives, while ensuring that those steps are anchored in a political framework that moves the parties forward towards the establishment of two States.

The United Nations remains actively engaged in advancing those efforts with all relevant parties and is committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation. The United Nations is committed to achieving a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

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

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

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

The United States applauds the difficult but important role the international community plays in the pursuit of peace and stability throughout the Middle East. At the outset, we would like to extend our condolences to the family of the Irish peacekeeper killed and wish a speedy recovery to the three injured in the attack on a United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon patrol. The United States strongly supports the vital work of peacekeepers. That incident is a reminder of the cost we all bear in the pursuit of peace and the responsibility we have to those lost in its noble pursuit to make all efforts to arrest the violence — not just in Lebanon.

The United States is deeply concerned by the sustained escalation of violence in the West Bank. The heartbreaking death of a 16-year-old, Jana Zakarneh, is yet another tragic reminder of the human cost of this conflict and the importance of all parties to work to bring about an end to the conflict. In this regard, it is imperative that the parties take urgent action to reduce the troubling levels of extremist violence fuelling instability in the West Bank. The United States expects to see equal treatment of extremists — whether Israeli or Palestinian — in arrests, convictions and punishments, as well as equal allocation of resources to prevent and investigate violent attacks.

It is also vital for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to both condemn all forms of violence irrespective of the nationality of the perpetrator. Both parties must remain committed to the idea that each people deserves to have equal measures of security, stability, justice, dignity and democracy.

Unilateral actions and unhelpful rhetoric by the parties only serve to escalate tensions, fuel violence and undermine the prospects of a negotiated two-State solution. Those actions must stop.

The United States was deeply disappointed in the Palestinian-led initiative in the General Assembly to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice against Israel. This action is counterproductive and will only take the parties further away from the objective we all share of a negotiated two-State solution.

We also underscore the imperative of maintaining the historic status quo at the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount and condemn provocative actions and rhetoric related to the holy site.

We urge all sides to take further steps to improve the situation to the benefit of the Israeli and Palestinian people alike. Steps — however small — are badly needed from both Israelis and Palestinians to begin to re-establish the confidence required to live side by side. We call on the international community to support such steps.

However, amid the tension and anguish over the current situation, we must also look forward. I just returned from a trip to the United Arab Emirates and Israel led by my friends Ambassador Gilad Erdan and Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh. Along with a group of other ambassadors, I had the opportunity to see first-hand the vast potential for Israel's normalization with Arab countries. The Abraham Accords have the potential to bring tremendous benefits to the region, and the United States will continue to be a strong advocate of the Accords as a way to further trade, innovation, partnerships and people-to-people exchanges in the Middle East.

While normalization between Israel and its neighbours is not a substitute for building peace between Israelis and Palestinians, it provides new avenues for pursuing the same and creating new opportunities to benefit the lives of Palestinians. This Administration strongly believes in the value of normalization in harnessing its potential to create a more stable, secure and prosperous Middle East for the benefit of all.

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Tor Wennesland for his briefing, which gives us a sense of the gravity of the situation on the ground. The very worrying level of violence increases the risk of further escalation. We share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his report.

The year 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005. In this context, we call on all actors to remain calm. France calls on the Israeli authorities to use force in a proportionate manner.

We are deeply shocked by the murder of a Palestinian teenager in Jenin on 11 December. This attack must be investigated. We recall that the protection of civilians is an obligation under international humanitarian law.

France condemns the violence of settlers who attack Palestinian civilians as well as members of Israeli civil society. All this only increases the risk of spiralling provocations and reprisals. Those responsible for this violence must answer for their actions before the competent authorities. At the same time, France condemns all terrorist attacks against Israelis, which are unacceptable and which we have strongly condemned. We reaffirm our commitment to the security of Israel.

In this context, the priority today is to put an end to the Israeli policy of colonization in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. France condemns this policy of colonization. Demolitions of Palestinian structures are intensifying in the West Bank, particularly in Area C, most recently of a school financed by the international community on 23 November. Like all children, Palestinian children have a right to education.

We are also very concerned about the continuing evictions of Palestinians. We are worried about the continued construction of outposts and the announcements that promise their legalization. We call on the next Israeli Government not to implement these decisions, and, with our main partners, we will remain vigilant on this issue. In the Palestinian territories, as elsewhere, France will never recognize the illegal annexation of territories.

All these unilateral measures, in violation of international law, are pushing away the prospect of direct talks between the parties, and in the long term, the prospect of a two-State solution. They also contribute to the dynamic of annexation and therefore to further destabilization. To preserve the two-State solution, it is more necessary than ever to continue the implementation of the policy of differentiation, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), that is, to legally formalize the distinction between the territory of Israel and the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

We also recall the importance of respecting the historical status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. In the current context, we must avoid any act of provocation.

Finally, the Security Council has a duty to preserve the Oslo Accords and defend the two-State solution. At a time when violations of the Oslo Accords are multiplying, particularly violations of the provisions relating to Area C, the Security Council has a responsibility to the parties. Past agreements must

be respected. The policy of *fait accompli* must not undermine the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capitals of both States. Israelis and Palestinians deserve a just and lasting peace.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing and for the written report.

Like others, we are concerned about the continued high level of violence and unrest in the West Bank, which is at its most deadly since 2005. The killing of a 16-year-old girl last week during an Israeli military operation in Jenin is another tragic example of the consequences for Palestinian civilians. We once again urge Israeli security forces to exercise the utmost restraint in its use of force.

The current situation is in no way sustainable. In the long run, it is in neither party's interest to keep this conflict unresolved. The deteriorating situation on the ground is a symptom of the lack of a political solution. It is leading the parties further away from peace and undermining the two-State solution.

We are seeing continued settlement expansion, house demolitions, evictions and settler violence. Not only are the Israeli settlements illegal under international law, they also undermine prospects for an independent and contiguous Palestinian State. They are also fuelling distrust and despair.

Furthermore, Israeli security operations in the West Bank have, during past months, led to many civilian casualties among Palestinians, including children and youth. Provocations and incitement to violence are contributing to increasing tensions. The status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem must be upheld and respected.

Violence against civilians, including terror attacks, are totally unacceptable and cannot be justified. Norway also calls on all parties to always keep schools and children safe. The inviolability of United Nations premises, including at schools operating under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, must be respected by all.

The lack of political progress towards a sustainable solution has led many, both Israelis and Palestinians, to lose faith in the two-State solution. Let me reiterate Norway's clear position 75 years after the partition plan was approved by the United Nations: we believe that a

negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, relevant United Nations resolutions and international parameters is the best way to achieve lasting peace and ensure the rights, safety and independence of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Norway supports the United Nations Special Coordinator's approach. Direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians must be taken up as soon as possible. At the same time, the situation on the ground must be improved, and a minimum of trust rebuilt. Measures are also needed to reduce tensions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the short term, it is also crucial to continue to bolster the ceasefire in Gaza and strengthen the Palestinian Authority, its institutions and the Palestinian economy. Palestinians must be allowed to generate income from their land and resources, including in Area C in the West Bank.

The work of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians donor group and the continued support for Palestinian institution-building remain important in this situation. The political division between Gaza and the West Bank complicates efforts to find a political solution. A strong and unified Palestinian leadership, with renewed democratic legitimacy, is necessary.

Norway urges Israelis and Palestinians to work constructively with the United Nations Special Coordinator to lay the groundwork for peace, and we call upon all States, including the members of the Security Council, to contribute to this work.

Not only is the stalled peace process negatively affecting the people who live there — and who pay the highest price for the lack of a political solution and fundamental rights — it also affects the whole region. Long-term stability in the region requires achieving a mutually acceptable solution to the question of Palestine that will bring freedom, justice and security to everyone. The normalization of relations between countries is creating new opportunities and dynamics in the Middle East. Progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would open up many more possibilities.

As this is my last statement during our current term on the Council, I would like to bring representatives back 30 years ago to Oslo. At the time, courageous negotiators from the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Israel, one of which considered the other a terrorist organization while being itself viewed by that other as an illegitimate State, came together to

agree to disagree on the past, but also to agree on a way forward towards a two-State solution based on United Nations resolutions. That proves that it is possible to bring archenemies together around the negotiating table if there is political will and brave political leadership. We should never lose hope that this can be possible again. And we as a Council should unite and redouble our efforts to push for a two-State solution, which we all agree on.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing, and we want to take this opportunity to reiterate Mexico's full support to him. He has once again presented us with a worrisome picture that reflects a fragile situation on the ground. In the two years during which Mexico has been an elected member of the Security Council, we have witnessed growing tensions and a continued stalemate in the political process. I would like to share some reflections in that regard.

Concerning the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), we deplore the numerous actions that have violated the resolution's provisions and created an atmosphere that is not conducive to a resolution of the conflict. We would like to underscore the following. First, despite the fact that the construction of settlements is illegal under international law, more than 14,000 housing units have been built in the past two years. Secondly, at least 1,800 demolitions have been recorded, resulting in the displacement of more than 2,000 Palestinians, half of them minors. Thirdly, there has been an increase in attacks on civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law. Furthermore, rocket attacks from Gaza have continued. In the past two years, 517 Palestinians and 30 Israelis have been killed and nearly 30,000 people wounded. Fourthly, it has not been possible to dismantle the terrorists' capacities, the settler violence has increased, and the use of inflammatory rhetoric by both sides has continued unabated. Fifthly, there have been repeated attempts to change the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem, undermining Jordan's role as their custodian.

Despite all of that, there have been some positive steps, such as the easing of the movement of people and goods to and from Gaza, an increase in permits for Palestinian workers, continued civil, fiscal and security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and a commitment to intra-Palestinian reconciliation in accordance with the Algiers declaration.

It is clear that it has not been possible to break the cycle of violence, as the confrontations of May 2021 and August 2022 showed. As the diagnosis we have just heard confirmed, a viable political solution for addressing the structural causes of the conflict is essential. The responsibility for resuming the peace process unquestionably falls on the parties to the conflict. However, it is also incumbent on the international community and the Security Council to sponsor a political process aimed at promoting a just and sustainable peace in the region. After adopting dozens of resolutions over the past decades, the Council cannot remain mired in its inability to achieve the peace and security that millions of Palestinian and Israeli children deserve. The right to prosperity and security for Palestinians and Israelis cannot be subject to conditions. The right moment will be fostered through a confluence of the good offices of regional actors, bilateral initiatives and back channels in parallel with multilateral dialogue.

Over the past 24 months, my country has tried to contribute to a comprehensive solution of the conflict based on the premise of two States, Israel and Palestine, in a solution that both addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns and creates a politically and economically viable Palestinian State, coexisting in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. As a country that is committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Mexico will continue to support all efforts aimed at establishing lasting peace in the region, based on mutual respect and full adherence to the rule of law.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

China has always attached great importance to the question of Palestine, which is critical to peace and stability in the Middle East, as well as international fairness and justice. President Xi Jinping has put forward initiatives to resolve the Palestinian question on many occasions, and he has sent a congratulatory message to the United Nations commemorative meeting on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People every year for the past 10 years. A short while ago, while attending the China-Arab summit and meeting with Arab leaders, President Xi reiterated China's unwavering support to the just cause of the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate

national right to an independent Palestinian State and Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, as well as China's willingness to continue its unremitting efforts to promote a speedy, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

China supports the full implementation of a two-State solution. The historical injustices suffered by the Palestinian people cannot be prolonged indefinitely, their legitimate national rights cannot be traded away and their demand for independent statehood cannot be vetoed. The international community should stay committed and work together to translate the concept of a two-State solution from consensus into action and from vision into reality.

China advocates strengthening the authority of the Palestinian National Authority, supports greater unity among Palestinian factions and welcomes the important progress made by various Arab countries in promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We advocate placing the Palestinian question high on the international agenda, supporting a resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel as soon as possible on the basis of a two-State solution, and calling for the convening of a larger-scale, more authoritative and more influential international peace conference.

China encourages Palestine and Israel to pursue common security. This year has been the deadliest since 2005 for Palestinians in the West Bank, with more than half of the deaths there occurring during Israeli military or search-and-arrest operations. Attacks on Israeli civilians have also hit a record high since 2015. China condemns all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and serious violations against children, opposes the excessive use of force by security forces and calls for investigations into the violence in question in order to ensure accountability. The occupying Power should also effectively fulfil its obligations under international law to ensure the security of the population in the occupied territories.

Palestine and Israel are inseparable neighbours with indivisible security. The international community should pay equal attention to the legitimate security concerns of both sides, encourage cooperation between them, achieve common security through political dialogue and peace talks, put an end to violence begetting violence and break the vicious cycle.

China urges compliance with the international rule of law. Six years have passed since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which has yet to be effectively implemented. Israel's settlement activity continues to expand, encroaching on Palestinian land and resources, squeezing the living space of the Palestinian people, violating the Palestinians' right to self-determination and making a contiguous, independent and sovereign Palestinian State even more elusive.

The Riyadh declaration of the China-Arab States summit stresses that settlement activity in the occupied territories is illegal and that the unilateral practices to change the status quo in Jerusalem are null and void. We urge Israel to comply with its obligations under the resolutions of the Security Council, to cease all settlement activity, including the demolition of Palestinian homes and the threat of eviction for the population of Masafer Yatta and other areas, to stop making unilateral changes to the status quo in the occupied territories and to return the right track of the two-State solution.

China supports the improvement of the Palestinian economy and people's livelihoods. The 55-year-long occupation and frequent conflict and turmoil have severely constrained Palestinian economic and social development and continue to worsen the plight of the Palestinian people. We call on Israel to ease unreasonable restrictions on the movement of people and goods and the use of land in the occupied territories, create conditions for development in Palestinian communities in the West Bank and lift the blockade of Gaza as soon as possible. The international community should provide assistance to Palestine through multiple channels in order to help to ease its financial crisis and guarantee public services.

China has always cared about the Palestinian people. We will continue to provide them with humanitarian assistance, support the implementation of livelihood projects on the ground and increase our contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The Palestinian-Israeli question has been on the United Nations agenda for more than seven decades. During that time, generations of Palestinians have seen their hair go grey, their childhoods lost in tears and their hopes dashed in waiting. In today's meeting, we have once again heard the overwhelming majority of countries support the strong voice of the Palestinian

people in favour of independent statehood. I must therefore ask the following question: what is stopping the Palestinian people from achieving that legitimate right? We must point out that every day of inaction by the international community is a disservice to peace, a betrayal of justice and a failure to the next generation. We call on all parties to use their conscience in order to uphold justice and take action to fulfil their commitments.

We hope that the United Nations and the Security Council will take substantive steps to advance the two-State solution and support the Palestinian people in restoring and exercising their inalienable rights, so that Palestine and Israel can coexist in peace, the two peoples — Arabs and Jews — can live in harmony and lasting peace can be achieved in the Middle East. The new year is upon us. We hope the new year will bring new hope to the Palestinian people.

Mr. Costa Filho (Brazil): I thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important meeting. I would like to begin by conveying our appreciation to Mr. Wennesland for his relentless efforts as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and for the timely and detailed updates he brought to our attention today.

The latest report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) paints a worrisome picture to all of us who aspire to achieve a two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace for both Israel and Palestine. The continuation of settlement activities, as cited in the report, does not contribute to our endeavours towards peace in the region. Brazil is appalled by the surge in violence against civilians, including a significant number of children. As pointed out in the report, 2022 has been the year with the highest number of civilian fatalities in the West Bank since 2005, when the United Nations started tracking them. We call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from any actions that could further escalate tensions and cause more violence and suffering. All obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law must be strictly observed, and the most vulnerable, in particular children, must never be targeted by attacks of any sort.

In reference to that disturbing trend, we agree with the report's assessment that the violence must stop and that all perpetrators must be held accountable.

Brazil also echoes its call on the leaders of all sides to contribute towards calming the situation. That includes halting provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. Moreover, in indicating the fragility of the current political and security dynamics, the report underscores that “The increase in violence and terrorism and the absence of a political horizon have empowered extremists and are eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.”

It is therefore urgent that we make progress towards addressing the conflict’s driving forces with a view to securing a just and sustainable political solution. Brazil reiterates its understanding that simply continuing to manage this conflict with no end in sight is not an option. Let us renew our collective resolve to seek flexibility and engagement from Israeli and Palestinian authorities alike. Taking efforts to resume meaningful negotiations is a matter of urgency.

Finally, we take this opportunity to express our concern about the lack of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme. The regular flow of aid and humanitarian resources is crucial to preventing further destabilization. We hope that donors will respond to both agencies’ fundraising efforts to support their life-saving activities.

Let me conclude by reiterating Brazil’s long-standing commitment to a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in security, in two democratic, prosperous and sovereign States, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his informative briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The twenty-fourth quarterly report of the Secretary-General is shocking. Six years after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), it is clear that its implementation has fallen well short of our expectations. The settlement activities, the seizures and demolitions of property and the expropriations of Palestinians have continued. The violations and violence against civilians and acts of terror have intensified, while their perpetrators have not been held to account. The clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces have continued with an unprecedented level of violence, making 2022 the

deadliest year since the intifada of 2005. The cycle of violence and bloodshed is untenable. It is imperative that the Council strive to put an end to that cycle and create the conditions for a lasting peace in the region.

In Gaza, despite the ongoing risk of escalation, we note the prevailing fragile calm with the maintenance of the ceasefire, thanks to the efforts of the United Nations and regional partners, as well as the measures taken by Israel to alleviate pressures and further facilitate economic activities. The fragility of the political and security dynamics, particularly in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains concerning. We therefore call on the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from any belligerent rhetoric that would undermine the quest for peace, and instead to commit to holding a frank and constructive dialogue for the benefit of both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. Gabon reaffirms its commitment to a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within the recognized 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

We call on the international community to mobilize to fund bodies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme so as to tackle the Palestinian people’s growing humanitarian needs. On the sensitive issue of the return of human remains to their families in Israel and Palestine, we call on the parties to prioritize the matter and to create a climate of trust in favour of a lasting peace.

In conclusion, we welcome the efforts of Special Coordinator Wennesland for peace in the Middle East, particularly the ongoing dialogue that he is conducting with various Israeli and Palestinian leaders, and with regional and international partners, to address the dangerous trends in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

We note the alarming frequency of the spiking violence that is recurring in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and Gaza. We believe firmly that the situation will remain volatile until the parties reach mutually acceptable agreements on all final-status issues based on the generally recognized international legal framework for the Middle East peace process, with a two-State solution — which we have always supported — as a central element.

In the context of the information provided by the Special Coordinator on the progress made in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), we reaffirm our principled position whereby the establishment of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a violation of international law and one of the main obstacles to resolving the conflict. Mass arbitrary arrests of Palestinians occur on a daily basis. In the West Bank, the Israelis continue to conduct disproportionately violent raids, while there are also regular outbreaks of violence around the Gaza Strip. According to available statistics, since the beginning of the year 158 people have been killed in the West Bank and 52 in Gaza. In yet another tragic incident, a young girl named Jana Zakarneh was killed in Jenin last week. Meanwhile, the expropriation and demolition of Palestinian property continue, along with systematic violations of the status quo of Jerusalem's holy sites. Besides that, Israel's arbitrary illegal actions go beyond the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, affecting neighbouring Arab countries with numerous violations of their sovereignty, including attacks on Syrian and Lebanese territory.

Against that backdrop, the United States, on fabricated pretexts, has withdrawn from participating the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, whose other participants are Russia, the European Union and the United Nations. That decision has essentially blocked the work of that multilateral mechanism endorsed by many Security Council resolutions. The Russian Federation is committed to resolving the conflict in the Middle East in line with the provisions of international law and supports resuming the Quartet's activities as soon as possible. History has shown more than once that the United States' efforts to monopolize the Middle East peace process are untenable and doomed to failure, serving only to exacerbate the antagonism between Palestinians and Israelis. Suffice it to say that Washington's attempts to single-handedly resolve the conflict in 2014 took the peace process to a particularly low point of stagnation, where it remains to this day. For our part, we continue to advocate for meeting the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for their own independent State, based on the universally recognized international legal framework. We believe there is no alternative to direct negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis on all the parameters for a final settlement. In that connection, we support the package of resolutions on

the Middle East peace process adopted by the General Assembly last week (resolutions 77/123, 77/124, 77/125 and 77/126).

We believe that the international community has its own constructive role to play, both in the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue and in alleviating the acute humanitarian and socioeconomic situations in the occupied territories, especially Gaza. We attach great importance to continuing the effective work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which provides support to Palestinians both in the occupied territories and in neighbouring Arab countries.

Mr. Kimani (Kenya): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his presentation of the Secretary-General's report and his continued engagement with both Israeli and Palestinian officials. Our delegation has taken note of the report's summation of efforts by the parties and the international community to advance peace efforts. We welcome all the affirmative steps taken at the grass-roots and regional levels aimed at improving the current conditions in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Nevertheless, we can all agree that there is much more that needs to be done to bridge the gap between the current engagement and the situation on the ground, and to bring the Council's decisions closer to the aspiration of two States for the two peoples. In recognition of the absence of a genuine Israeli-Palestinian peace process underpinned by direct dialogue, we must sustain the urgency and continued engagement, commitment and focus on this issue. Efforts to create conditions conducive to negotiating all the final-status issues in a manner that takes into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides must be more robust.

Like its predecessors in past decades, the report points to the lack of meaningful progress on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Its implementation requires the political will of both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Our delegation continues to urge that reporting from the good offices of the Secretary-General be undergirded by an emphasis on paragraph 11 of the resolution, which calls for presenting clear objectives, timelines and feasible solutions to resolve the pending issues. That way the Council will be better positioned to examine practical ways and means to secure the full implementation of its relevant resolutions.

The Council must remain seized of the issue and take urgent action on the objectives of resolution 2334 (2016). They speak to the vital importance of stabilizing the situation and reversing the negative trends on the ground, which are undermining the prospects of a two-State solution along the 1967 lines, with an independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

The statistics relating to violent incidents, arrests, and fatalities reflected in the barely three months of the reporting period are alarming and unacceptable. In particular, all effort must be expended to ensure the protection of children.

In line with resolution 2334 (2016), there is a need to strengthen efforts to prevent, ensure accountability for and address violence against civilians, including acts of terrorism perpetrated by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant groups in Israel. The indiscriminate launching of rockets, including from residential neighbourhoods in Gaza, towards Israeli civilian population centres must stop.

Our delegation is concerned about the report of the presence of a man-made cavity underneath the grounds of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East school in Gaza. That poses security and safety risks to the children and staff and is a serious violation of the Agency's neutrality and a breach of international law. The neutrality and inviolability of United Nations premises must be protected.

The report also indicates that settlements, as well as demolitions, including the recent demolition of the school in Masafer Yatta, and evictions continue to increase in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law. Kenya calls on all parties concerned, including communal, political and religious leaders, to stop the inflammatory rhetoric in the interest of the promotion of peace and security. They should speak up against incitement and support the daily dividends of constructive grassroots efforts in mitigating the cycles of conflict.

In conclusion, and considering that this is Kenya's last engagement on this file before the end of our two-year tenure, I wish to thank the Special Coordinator and his team for their continued tireless engagement with both Israeli and Palestinian officials. The Council can continue to count on Kenya's support. I reaffirm Kenya's commitment to the two-State solution, along

the 1967 lines, with an independent and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

Mr. Mythen (Ireland): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing. He can be assured of our full and continued support for his work.

Today's meeting is Ireland's last on the situation in the Middle East during our current term on the Security Council. While we would have liked to acknowledge progress on that file, the reality is that the prospects of reopening a political horizon and achieving the two-State solution are as remote today as when we joined the Council two years ago. The consequences of this have never been more stark.

This month, we marked a tragic milestone — 2022 has become the deadliest year for Palestinians living in the West Bank since the United Nations began recording fatalities in 2005. Today we want to focus on three issues that are central to putting us back on the path to peace: first, the need to halt Israeli settlement activity; secondly, the need to protect civilians and ensure accountability; and thirdly, the need to rekindle hope through de-escalation, the restoration of a political horizon and support for civil society and humanitarian actors.

Six years ago, the Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), reiterating its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel has ignored the Council's demand. As Mr. Wennesland's briefing today highlights, Israel continues to establish and expand settlements in flagrant violation of international law. That is simply unacceptable. As we have repeatedly stated in the Council, settlements undermine prospects for the two-State solution and are a major obstacle to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We repeat our call on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity and to comply fully with resolution 2334 (2016).

There has also been a sharp rise in settler violence, with Israeli forces consistently failing to prevent settlers from harming Palestinians. It is imperative that Israel act urgently to prevent such incidents. We also wish to reiterate the importance of protecting the holy sites in Jerusalem, and our full respect for Jordan's custodial role.

As highlighted in Mr. Wennesland's briefing, the level of violence against civilians we have witnessed this year is deeply alarming. Ireland is particularly concerned about the plight of children. Forty-two

Palestinian children and one Israeli child have been killed in 2022. That is more than double the number killed last year. Moreover, we share Mr. Wennesland's deep concern about Israel's widespread use of the administrative detention of minors. Ireland condemns in the strongest of terms the killing of 16-year-old Jana Zakarneh, who was shot dead on the roof of her own home during an Israel Defense Forces operation in Jenin. We reiterate our call for accountability in respect of all civilian deaths. Accountability is the cornerstone of a political horizon and a meaningful peace process.

In Ireland's first address to the Council on this issue in January 2021 (see S/2021/91), Minister Simon Coveney recalled that, during the lowest moments of our own peace process in Ireland, we never lost sight of the need for what we called then the "duty of hope". Such hope requires all sides to exercise restraint and take steps towards de-escalation. We must urgently break the current cycle of violence.

It requires us to redouble our efforts to deliver a political horizon, addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict. It also requires us to protect and empower those who contribute to peacebuilding and the delivery of essential services to Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the region. In that regard, we are alarmed about the reduced space for civil society in the occupied Palestinian territory, which is likely to come under further threat in the coming months. We reiterate our call on Israel to reverse its decision on the designation of human rights non-governmental organizations as terrorist entities.

We are deeply concerned about reports that Salah Hammouri, a Palestinian-French lawyer and human rights defender, has been forcibly deported from the occupied Palestinian territory by the Israeli authorities. Mr. Hammouri's deportation is a breach of international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. We condemn this action by the Israeli authorities. Mr. Hammouri must be allowed to return home.

We acknowledge the vital role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for stability in the region and welcome the extension of its mandate for a further three years. We are particularly concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip, where a vast majority of the population continue to depend on humanitarian assistance.

Finally, let me assure members that even as our term on the Council concludes, Ireland will remain closely engaged on this conflict and will continue to monitor

the situation very closely and intensively. Ireland remains committed to supporting all efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting two-State solution, at the United Nations and beyond. We continue to believe that, with sustained political will, progress is possible, and that is now more important than ever.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for the updated information he provided.

The mood in the room, including ours, is not much different from that of the last time we met on the matter (see S/PV.9203). We express disappointment and regret that the situation on the ground continues to be affected by heightened risks and threats for further escalation, especially in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

As we all know, unilateral steps and actions in the Middle East are always problematic. However, they become dangerous in the current fragile, complex and persistently hostile environment. They fuel tensions and most often lead to violence — pervasive endless violence with unfortunate consequences that we have powerlessly witnessed so many times. As a result, those who suffer and end up paying the price are innocent civilians and the peace process.

This year, the detrimental impact on civilians has worsened. The number of casualties has increased rapidly and worryingly, and has affected mostly children — young girls and boys. In that respect, the tragic killing of a 16-year-old in Jenin is deeply troubling. We call on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and spare no effort in finding ways to ease the situation on the ground, while bearing in mind that the proliferation of violence will do no good to anyone. It will only harm the people, civilians, rather than to those who are responsible. We call for the full investigation of all the acts with fatal consequences for civilians on both sides and for those responsible to be held accountable.

We have expressed and reiterate our full support for the full implementation of resolution 2601 (2021), on safeguarding the right to education in conflict. Educational institutions, like United Nations premises, cannot and must be not used for military purposes — even less so for terrorist acts. Children cannot and must not be used as human shields. We have said it many times and reiterate our full and unreserved condemnation of any acts of terror against Israel and its people. Terror cannot be justified and should only be condemned by all. Albania stands with Israel, as it stands with any other

country in such a situation, in support of the legitimate right to self-defence through proportionate measures. We deplore the shooting and killing of a United Nations personnel member in Lebanon. The protection of peacekeepers is a must. They represent the Organization and are there to implement mandates approved by the Security Council. A full investigation of that tragic incident should therefore be conducted without delay.

International law and international humanitarian law are not optional and must be fully observed in any conflict by all. We reiterate our concern about the fact that the growing numbers of demolitions and evictions, as well as the advancement of settlements, do not comply with international law, are contrary to resolution 2334 (2016) and do not contribute to creating the conditions necessary for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nor do the inflammatory rhetoric and incitements to violence, whatever their source. They must all be condemned.

As we approach the end of the year, people from all over the world will be flocking to Bethlehem and Jerusalem for the seasonal celebrations. That is another reminder of the importance of safeguarding the holy sites and preserving their status quo. Maintaining peaceful religious coexistence is a further step towards achieving comprehensive peace in the region.

Let me conclude by expressing Albania's support for the importance of restoring a political horizon aimed at a just and negotiated two-State solution within the 1967 borders. A comprehensive peace means a safe and secure Israel and a viable, independent and democratic Palestine. It means no more violence. It means more development and a better life for all. It means hope and prospects for young people and boys and girls. It means a different Middle East, making a major contribution to peace and prosperity in the region and in the world. That can be achieved only with vision, leadership and courage by negotiating and implementing a plan for two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as their future shared capital.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Tor Wennesland, for his thorough briefing and his efforts in supporting peace in the region.

Here in the Security Council at this time last year, Mr. Wennesland expressed his concern about developments in the occupied Palestinian territory,

noting that if they were left unchecked, it was not only likely that the situation in the West Bank could deteriorate but that those developments could affect the security situation in the Gaza Strip. In that regard, we are now at the end of the deadliest year in the West Bank in nearly two decades, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has also noted that the number of children killed in the West Bank this year was twice that of last year. As for Gaza, we witnessed another spiral of violence in August that claimed the lives of 17 children. On the political front, there has been no serious action that might indicate an imminent return to talks between the two parties since negotiations ceased in 2014.

Given those realities, the Council must rely on intensifying political and diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions and help the parties return to negotiations. Today's meeting represents an opportunity for the Council to send a united message about the importance of achieving that. It is not only the future of two peoples that is at stake in the ongoing conflict, it is an entire region that could find itself in a dangerous spiral of violence. The United Arab Emirates will therefore never cease to call for de-escalation in the region and to reach out for peace and explore ways to create promising opportunities for young people away from the violence. We believe it is imperative to focus on the following messages throughout the coming period.

First, in the context of our discussion on resolution 2334 (2016) today, we reiterate our demand that Israel must stop all of its continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, which constitute a violation of international law and undermine peace efforts. That includes halting the announced plans to build new settlement units in various places. Considering the recent reports of plans for legalizing settlement outposts, we reaffirm our rejection of any steps aimed at annexing Palestinian lands or legitimizing annexation. Such practices raise many concerns about the future of a two-State solution, and we warn against the danger of undermining it to the extent that it will cease to be viable.

Secondly, it is imperative to refrain from inciting rhetoric and instead to focus on taking steps to reduce the violence. That includes putting an end to the settler-related violence as well as the demolitions and evictions of Palestinian buildings, of which there have been more than 700 this year, according to United Nations reports. Such illegal measures fuel anger and despair,

exacerbate the already severe humanitarian conditions and lead to more confrontations. We stress the importance of Israel's assumption of its responsibilities in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Thirdly, we need to explore the possible options to revive the Middle East peace process. That requires multilateral support, especially from the Council and the stakeholders and States that have always undertaken mediation efforts to resolve this conflict. But it does not imply having to start from square one. The agreed-on international mechanisms and parameters are still in place. What we need is to intensify international engagement with the two sides to build confidence, urge them to prioritize wisdom and demonstrate the serious political will needed to return to negotiations, in addition to reaffirming their commitment to a two-State solution.

Fourthly, we note that any unilateral measures that affect the legal status of Jerusalem and the holy sites are a violation of international law and likely to exacerbate tensions. We are concerned about the threats of the forced displacement of dozens of families in East Jerusalem, where settlements continue to expand. We reaffirm the necessity of respecting the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's custodianship of the holy sites and management of the endowments in Jerusalem.

In conclusion, we hope that the New Year will bring hope for the possibility of improving the conditions on the ground and achieving a quick return to negotiations that can eventually lead to the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and mutual recognition.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process Tor Wennesland for his comprehensive briefing on the prevailing situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, focusing on Israeli settlement activities.

We are deeply concerned about the reports that the period under review has seen a further deterioration of both the humanitarian and security situations on the ground and an increase in the number of Israeli settlement activities. We note with pain the fact that 2022 has been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the United Nations started recording

fatalities in 2005, and also that this has been the sixth consecutive year with an increase in the number of Israeli settler attacks in the occupied West Bank.

We express concern about the frequent raids and arbitrary arrests conducted by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the occupied Palestinian territories and convey our condolences to the family of the 16-year-old Palestinian girl who was shot dead on the roof of her house during an IDF raid in the West Bank town of Jenin. We call for a full investigation into the incident and reiterate our previous call on Israel to protect civilians, observe the principles of distinction and proportionality and exercise maximum restraint in the use of force.

We condemn in the strongest terms indiscriminate attacks on United Nations peacekeepers and all civilian personnel in the region, who continue to work under harsh conditions to maintain peace, and convey once again our condolences to the Government and the family of the Irish peacekeeper who was killed in a 14 December attack against a convoy of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon near the town of Al-Aqbieh, in southern Lebanon. We wish the three others who were injured a speedy recovery.

We also condemn all acts of terror and violence against civilians, as well as acts of provocation and incitement. We call for immediate steps to prevent violence, including acts of terror, against unarmed civilians, children and the aged, and urge both parties to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric.

We call on the Israeli Government not to continue with plans to expand or create new settlements, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, and not to proceed with the legalization of unauthorized settlements, including potential future measures that would support settlers and settlement activities in the West Bank, such as changing the law that currently prohibits settlers from living in the Homesh outpost. We do so mindful of the adverse impact of settlement activities on the Middle East peace process.

While awaiting the formation of a new Israeli Government, we underscore the need to prioritize a political horizon for the peaceful resolution of the conflict and urge the avoidance of unilateral steps that could undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We call on both sides to show maximum restraint and refrain from unilateral actions that could

escalate tensions and threaten the peace and mutual trust that are urgently needed to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends on the ground, as well as to create the conditions for subsequent negotiations and for advancing the two-State solution.

In conclusion, I wish to underscore the need for cooperation and unified action among all States Members of the United Nations. We reiterate our firm belief that lasting peace and an amicable solution to the prolonged conflict is possible only through direct talks between the Palestinians and Israelis, without any preconditions. We therefore urge both parties to resolve all differences through dialogue and negotiations in a comprehensive and mutually acceptable manner.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Six years ago, in December 2016, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016). The United Kingdom reaffirms its commitment to the core tenets of that text: first, the status quo is not sustainable, and urgent action is required to maintain the viability of the two-State solution; secondly, all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, provocation and destruction, must be prevented, and thirdly, Israel must immediately and completely cease all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.

Meaningful dialogue must end the cycle of violence that continues to have a devastating effect on the civilian population across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The death of 16-year-old Jana Zakarneh on 12 December in Jenin, during an Israeli search-and-arrest operation, is another tragic reminder of the human cost of this ongoing conflict. We urge Israel to exercise maximum restraint in its use of live fire. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must work together to de-escalate, continue crucial security cooperation and bring to an end the appalling violence we have seen in 2022.

The past month also saw the demolition of a donor-funded school in the South Hebron Hills. A second school, funded in part by the United Kingdom, is also being threatened with demolition. The United Kingdom condemns all demolitions by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in Area C. The Oslo Accords are clear — Area C should be gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction. I call on Israel

to avoid unilateral actions and to meet its obligations under international humanitarian law by providing a clear, transparent route to construction in Area C.

I urge donors to provide urgent support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in closing the Agency's critical funding gap this month. UNRWA plays a key role in regional stability.

The United Kingdom remains a firm supporter of a two-State solution based on 1967 lines and with Jerusalem as a shared capital as the only way to ensure a lasting peace between the parties. I encourage all parties and the international community to take actions that are helpful in bringing the parties back to a productive dialogue.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of India.

First, I thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). I also thank the Permanent Mission of Israel and the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine for their cooperation during India's two-year tenure in the Security Council. Likewise, I extend my appreciation to the Middle East team of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs for its support to our team.

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

We have said this before, and I now say it again — we remain deeply concerned about the developments in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. Violent attacks and the killing of civilians took many Palestinian and Israeli lives during the reporting period. Acts of destruction and provocation are also continuing. India has consistently advocated against all acts of violence, and we reiterate our call for immediate steps to ensure the complete cessation of violence.

We also note with concern — and the representative of Kenya also mentioned it — the recent report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) about a human-made cavity beneath an UNRWA school in Gaza.

Unilateral measures that unduly alter the status quo on the ground and undercut the viability of the two-State solution must be eschewed. It is extremely important for the international community and the Council to send a strong signal against any step that would prevent the possibility of durable peace between Israel and Palestine. It is only by realizing the vision of two States living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition and by resolving all final-status issues permanently through direct negotiations that the legitimate aspirations of both peoples will be achieved.

The absence of a political process to achieve a viable two-State solution continues to be the biggest impediment to the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question. One cannot overlook the consequences of the current status quo. Terror attacks, violence and

incitement continue to create mutual fear and suspicion between the parties. That could lead to the perpetuation of the conflict, which would only increase the number of casualties on both sides.

Let me therefore conclude by saying that there is no alternative to the two-State solution to guarantee lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, and direct negotiation is the only path that can lead us there. There cannot be any shortcuts on that count.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.