



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9451**<sup>st</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 24 October 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mr. Vieira . . . . . (Brazil)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hasani
China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
France . . . . .	Ms. Colonna
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Onanga Ndiaye
Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Borg
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland . . . . .	Ms. Tissafi
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Ms. Al Hashimy
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Tugendhat
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Blinken

## 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:** I would like to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other high-level representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Czechia, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Riad Al-Malki.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; and Ms. Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and His Excellency Mr. Paul Beresford-Hill, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta.

I also propose that the Council invite His Excellency Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

I give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

**The Secretary-General:** With your permission, Mr. President, I will make a brief introduction and then ask my colleagues to brief the Security Council on the situation on the ground.

The situation in the Middle East is growing more dire by the hour. The war in Gaza is raging and risks spiralling throughout the region. Divisions are splintering societies. Tensions threaten to boil over. At a crucial moment like this, it is vital to be clear on principles, starting with the fundamental principle of respecting and protecting civilians.

I have condemned unequivocally the horrifying and unprecedented 7 October acts of terror by Hamas in Israel. Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians, or the launching of rockets against civilian targets. All hostages must be treated humanely and released immediately and without conditions. I respectfully note the presence among us of members of their families.

It is important to also recognize that the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence, their economy stifled, their people displaced and their homes

demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing. But the grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas. And those appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Even war has rules. We must demand that all parties uphold and respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, take constant care in the conduct of military operations to spare civilians and respect and protect hospitals and respect the inviolability of United Nations facilities, which today are sheltering more than 600,000 Palestinians.

The relentless bombardment of Gaza by Israeli forces, the level of civilian casualties and the wholesale destruction of neighbourhoods continue to mount and are deeply alarming. I mourn and honour dozens of United Nations colleagues working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — sadly, at least 35 and counting — killed in the bombardment of Gaza over the past two weeks. I owe to their families my condemnation of these and many other similar killings.

The protection of civilians is paramount in any armed conflict. Protecting civilians can never mean using them as human shields. Protecting civilians does not mean ordering more than 1 million people to evacuate to the south, where there is no shelter, no food, no water, no medicine and no fuel, and then continuing to bomb the south itself.

I am deeply concerned about the clear violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing in Gaza. Let me be clear: no party to an armed conflict is above international humanitarian law.

Thankfully, some humanitarian relief is finally getting into Gaza; but it is a drop of aid in an ocean of need. In addition, our United Nations fuel supplies in Gaza will run out in a matter of days. That would be another disaster. Without fuel, aid cannot be delivered, hospitals will not have power and drinking water cannot be purified or even pumped.

The people of Gaza need continuous aid delivery at a level that corresponds to the enormous needs. That aid must be delivered without restrictions. I salute our United Nations colleagues and humanitarian partners in Gaza working under hazardous conditions and risking their lives to provide aid to those in need. They are an inspiration. To ease epic suffering, make the

delivery of aid easier and safer and facilitate the release of hostages, I reiterate my appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Even in this moment of grave and immediate danger, we cannot lose sight of the only realistic foundation for true peace and stability — a two-State solution. Israelis must see their legitimate needs for security materialized, and Palestinians must see their legitimate aspirations for an independent State realized, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Finally, we must be clear on the principle of upholding human dignity. Polarization and dehumanization are being fuelled by a tsunami of disinformation. We must stand up to the forces of antisemitism, anti-Muslim bigotry and all forms of hate.

Today is United Nations Day, marking 78 years since the Charter of the United Nations entered into force. That Charter reflects our shared commitment to advance peace, sustainable development and human rights. On this United Nations Day, at this critical hour, I appeal to all to pull back from the brink before the violence claims even more lives and spreads even further.

**The President:** I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

**Mr. Wennesland:** I thank the members of the Security Council for attention sustained attention to the grave developments unfolding in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around Gaza.

In the light of the horrific violence of the past weeks, allow me to begin by expressing my most sincere condolences to the thousands of families — in Israel, Palestine and across the globe — who are in mourning, in shock and in profound pain. That includes the families of 35 United Nations staff killed in Gaza.

The abhorrent attack launched by Hamas on 7 October and Israel's devastating, ongoing military operation in Gaza have taken a staggering toll on civilians and deeply shaken Israelis and Palestinians alike. As I told the Council last week (see S/PV.9443), and the Secretary-General has just expressed, the events we are witnessing are unprecedented. They risk expanding to the wider region and may have a profound

long-term impact on the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On the morning of 7 October, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups launched a large-scale, complex assault on Israel. The unprecedented attack saw an estimated 1,500 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants from Gaza infiltrate some 20 Israeli communities and military facilities in the Gaza periphery by land, sea and air, while thousands of rockets were launched towards central Israel, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The testimony and evidence emerging from that tragic day reveal a sickening killing spree, designed to terrorize, with appalling scenes of brutality, massacres and hostage-taking, including of infants and young children. In all, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups killed more than 1,400 Israelis and foreign nationals — the bloodiest attack in Israel's history. That includes more than 1,000 civilians, many of them women and children, and more than 360 security-force personnel. More than 5,400 Israelis were injured. At least 220 civilians, including women and children, as well as soldiers, were abducted and taken into Gaza Strip as hostages. While this has not been confirmed, Hamas has said that 22 hostages were killed by Israeli strikes. I welcome the release of four hostages and recognize the important role of Qatar in that regard. To the families of the hostages, some of whom are with us today, the fear and uncertainty they have had to endure is unimaginable. As the Secretary-General and I have said repeatedly, their loved ones must be returned to them immediately and unconditionally.

Heavy fighting between Israeli forces and militants inside Israeli communities continued until 10 October, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said they had regained control of the perimeter fence. More than 120,000 Israelis were displaced from the area. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza have continued to launch indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, reaching as far north as Haifa. To date, according to Israeli sources, some 7,700 rockets have been launched.

On the day of the attack, Israel's Security Cabinet declared a state of war for the first time in more than 50 years, with the aim of "the destruction of the military and governing capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad". That same day, Israeli forces began a massive bombardment of what they said were Hamas sites throughout Gaza. Israel's air assault on the Strip is still ongoing, with some 5,000 such sites targeted,

according to the IDF. On 8 October, Israel's Minister of Defence announced a complete siege of Gaza, blocking the entry of all goods, including electricity, water, food, fuel and medical equipment. The air strikes have been devastating and have resulted in a staggering number of Palestinian fatalities, a huge percentage of whom are civilians. So far, the Ministry of Health in Gaza has reported more than 5,000 Palestinians killed, including 1,100 women and 2,000 children, as well as journalists, medical workers and first responders, with more than 15,000 injured. Authorities estimate that hundreds more lie dead or injured under the rubble, as rescue efforts languish amid continued air strikes. More than 1 million Palestinians have been displaced.

The level of physical destruction has left entire neighbourhoods in rubble and critical infrastructure has been destroyed or damaged. Schools, including those run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and hospitals — many sheltering displaced Palestinians — have been hit. The displacement levels are unprecedented. Compounding the destruction from air strikes, the humanitarian impact has been immense. In that regard, I welcome Egypt's facilitation in opening the Rafah border crossing on 21 October and reiterate that humanitarian assistance needs to flow safely and uninterrupted into the Strip. I echo the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Lynn Hastings, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, will report in full on the humanitarian situation, on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths.

The risks of a significant further deterioration of the situation in the occupied West Bank or spillover of the conflict in the region remains significant. Violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, already at worrisome levels, has increased since the outbreak of the war. The Israeli authorities have imposed widespread movement restrictions and conducted extensive arrests. Large numbers of daily clashes and armed exchanges between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and settlers have been recorded, as well as settler-related violence and Palestinian attacks on Israelis. Since 7 October, 93 Palestinians, including 27 children, have been killed by the Israeli security forces or settlers, and one member of Israeli security personnel was killed in an armed exchange. Large demonstrations in solidarity with the population

of Gaza have taken place in cities across the West Bank, with some leading to confrontations with Palestinian security forces.

Meanwhile, across the Blue Line, and amid heightened rhetoric from actors on the ground, there have been intermittent but intense exchanges of fire every day since 8 October. Hizbullah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have launched rockets and anti-tank missiles towards Israel, while the IDF has responded with artillery fire and air strikes, leading to casualties on both sides. On 13 and 20 October, two journalists were killed. Palestinian militants from Lebanon have also made several infiltration attempts, the most significant of them on 9 October. More than 80,000 Israelis have been evacuated from their homes and some 20,000 Lebanese have been displaced.

In the Golan, the Israel Defense Forces responded on 10 October with artillery and mortar shells to what they said were a number of launches from Syria towards Israel. Syrian State media reported Israeli air attacks on 12 and 22 October that targeted the international airports in Damascus and Aleppo, and again targeting the Aleppo airport on 14 October. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force continues to engage with both parties, urging them to exercise maximum restraint and respect their obligations under the 1974 Agreement on the Disengagement of Forces.

The Secretary-General has been very clear in expressing the condemnation by the United Nations of the horrific attacks by Hamas and others on 7 October and deep alarm at the scale of Israeli air strikes and the scope of civilian casualties and destruction in Gaza. In the past week the Secretary-General and I have been pursuing any and every opportunity to address the situation on the ground and prevent further civilian death and misery. It is critical that we, as a united international community, employ all our collective efforts to end the bloodletting and prevent any further expansion of hostilities, including in the region. The stakes are astronomically high, and I appeal to all relevant actors to act responsibly. Any miscalculation could have immeasurable consequences. In that regard, I welcome Egypt's convening on 21 October of the Cairo peace summit and the efforts of States in the region and beyond to address the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding before us and pave the way for unlocking a real and serious peace process.

These devastating events are not divorced from the broader context in the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel and the region, where the dynamics are deeply intertwined. The unresolved conflict and continued occupation shape the reality of every Israeli and every Palestinian. For 15 years the Palestinian population has been living under militant rule and a strict closure regime, as the Palestinian divide hardened. For a generation, hope has been lost and despair has prevailed for those who see prospects for a more peaceful future pulling still further away. Only a political solution can move us forward. The steps we take to address the crisis must be implemented in a way that ultimately advances a negotiated peace and fulfils the legitimate national aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis, the long-held vision of two States, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Hastings.

**Ms. Hastings:** I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to update the Security Council on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths.

At the outset, I want to welcome the release of two hostages on Saturday and another two yesterday. We are grateful to the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Amir of Qatar for mediating their release and to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for facilitating. However, the more than 200 hostages still being held must be released without condition or any further delay. We welcome all diplomatic efforts to secure their release and demand that, in the interim, they be treated humanely and be allowed to receive visits from the ICRC.

As intense air strikes continue to rain down on Gaza and as indiscriminate rockets fly into Israel, death, injury, destruction and displacement are mounting. On the Israeli side, the fatality toll is more than three times the cumulative number of Israelis killed since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began recording casualties in 2005. In Gaza, the reported Palestinian fatality toll of the past 17 days is more than double the total number of fatalities of the entire 2014 war which lasted 50 days. Women and children comprise some 62 per cent of the victims.

The number of those who are internally displaced has swelled to 1.4 million. Nearly 600,000 people are sheltering in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities in increasingly dire conditions. The average number of internally displaced persons per shelter has reached 2.5 times the capacity.

As my colleagues have repeatedly highlighted, there is nowhere to seek refuge in Gaza. When it comes to decisions on whether and where to flee, civilians are damned if they do and damned if they don't. Displaced families are reportedly returning to north Gaza owing to ongoing bombardments because their basic needs, including safety, cannot be met in the south. I reiterate that civilians must be protected and have the essentials they need to survive — whether they move or stay.

To give Council members an idea of the scale of destruction, according to the Gaza Ministry of Housing, at least 42 per cent of all housing units in the Strip have already been either destroyed or damaged since 7 October. The scale of destruction calls into question the ability of people to ever return to their homes.

Meanwhile, Gaza remains under a full electricity blackout. Hospitals are on the brink of collapse owing to shortages of electricity, medicine, equipment, specialized personnel and the damage and destruction. Patients are being treated on the floor owing to a shortage of beds. Doctors are being forced to operate without anaesthesia. Since 7 October, 16 health workers in Gaza have reportedly been killed and 30 injured while on duty.

In the middle of the tumult, the agreement to use Rafah crossing from Egypt to get essential humanitarian supplies into Gaza has provided a glimmer of hope to people living in appalling conditions. This past weekend, 34 trucks entered Gaza with life-saving supplies and another 20 crossed Rafah into Gaza yesterday. Twenty more are due to cross today. We welcome that important development, and we pledge to do our part to ensure the deliveries increase and continue.

But the deliveries are a drop in the bucket compared to the vast scale of needs. They amount to no more than 4 per cent of the daily average volume of commodities entering Gaza prior to these hostilities. Needs are now, of course, significantly greater. And most crucially, the deliveries made over the past few days do not include fuel. That is essential for powering the services that are needed for people to survive. Without fuel, our

humanitarian operation will stop. No fuel means no hospitals functioning, no desalination of water and no baking. Many people are drinking saline groundwater, increasing the risks of diarrhoea, cholera and other health issues. We urge Israel to bring water and electricity supplies back to pre-conflict levels and work with us to find a secure way of bringing fuel into Gaza.

While we negotiate with the Government of Israel as to how best to bring fuel into Gaza, we have 400,000 litres on trucks ready to go. That would provide fuel for approximately 2.5 more days.

If the civilians across Gaza are to get access to adequate food, water, medical care and other essential supplies, we must be able to scale up deliveries of all goods, and we must be able to replenish fuel supplies. It will be important also that the Israeli crossings for the movement of people and goods are opened.

I want to express my utmost admiration for the bravery and extraordinary commitment of those delivering life-saving and humanitarian services in Gaza. That includes the incredible staff at UNRWA, many of whom are displaced themselves and who continue to support the most vulnerable, despite it all. We must also pay tribute to the 35 UNRWA colleagues who have tragically been killed. I urge the Council to redouble funding to UNRWA and other humanitarian agencies on the ground without delay so they can continue those indispensable efforts.

Today of all days, when we celebrate the United Nations, we must all continue to demand respect for international humanitarian law. The parties on all sides must take constant care to spare civilians — including medical and humanitarian personnel — and civilian objects — including homes, hospitals and humanitarian assets. Civilians must have the essentials to survive, and to that end, the passage of rapid and unimpeded and increased humanitarian relief must be facilitated, and water and electricity connections resumed. I urge all countries with influence to exert it and ensure respect for the rules of war.

Agreement on the resumption of aid deliveries and the release of a small number of hostages over the past few days shows that, through diplomacy and negotiations, humanity can prevail, and we can find humanitarian solutions, even in the depths of this conflict. In that spirit, I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to ease the epic human suffering.

If we are to prevent any further descent into this humanitarian catastrophe, dialogue must continue to ensure essential supplies can get into Gaza at the scale needed to spare civilians and the infrastructure they depend on, to release hostages and to avoid any further escalation and spillover.

The world is looking to the Member States on the Council to play their part in leading the way.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Hastings for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Observer State of Palestine.

**Mr. Al-Malki (Palestine):** We are here today to stop the killing and to stop the massacres being committed against the Palestinian people. The ongoing massacres being deliberately, systematically and savagely perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population under its illegal occupation must be stopped.

The Security Council has a duty to stop them. The international community is obliged under international law to stop them. It is our collective human duty to stop them now. The continued failure by the Security Council is inexcusable.

We express appreciation to Brazil for convening this meeting of the Security Council and elevating its participation in the light of the gravity of the situation we are facing. We thank the Secretary-General for his sobering briefing and tireless efforts and that of the United Nations agencies and humanitarian staff on the ground, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is working around the clock under the most inhumane conditions to aid our people and uphold a minimum sense of humanity. We mourn with them the senseless killing of UNRWA staff and other humanitarian workers, including doctors, nurses and paramedics, who were directly targeted by this ongoing barbaric aggression. They are heroic champions of humanity at a time of abject depravity.

More than 2 million Palestinians are on a survival mission every day and every night. By the time representatives are done delivering their speeches today, 150 Palestinians will have been killed, including 60 children. In the past two weeks, more than 5,700 Palestinians have been killed, including more than 2,300 children and 1,300 women. In proportion to the population of Gaza, that is the equivalent of 145,000

British citizens, or 700,000 United States citizens. Almost all those killed by Israel are civilians. More than 1 million people have been displaced. Some 170,000 housing units have been destroyed.

Only international law and peace are worthy of the unconditional support of the countries here today. More injustice and more killing will not make Israel safer. No amount of weapons and no alliance will bring security to it — only peace with Palestine and its people will. The fate of the Palestinian people cannot continue to be dispossession, displacement, denial of rights and death. Our freedom depends on shared peace and security.

The members of the Council have all spoken about addressing the Palestinian people's legitimate grievances and legitimate aspirations and helping them to achieve their right to self-determination and supporting its realization. For those actively engaged in preventing an even greater humanitarian catastrophe and regional spillover, it must be clear that that can be achieved only by putting an immediate end to the Israeli war launched against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Stop the bloodshed.

There is no amount of humanitarian aid that can address the situation if more death, destruction and devastation are imposed on our people in Gaza. There is no way to contain underlying tensions in our region if that reality does not change. There are many fronts open for war, and none for peace.

Some of my colleagues spoke to me about the pain and anger of bereaved families. Every family in Gaza is a bereaved family. No one is spared. No one is safe. Where is the solidarity with them? Where is the empathy for them? Where is the outrage about those killed? If those expressions are genuine, they cannot be accompanied by excuses for the killer and reasons for him to continue the killing. We should be on the same side. All of us who believe in justice, peace, the rule of international law and the value and sanctity of human life should stand shoulder to shoulder in these moments. But that is possible only if everyone recognizes the value of Palestinian life and the need to uphold Palestinian rights. That is possible only if they offer unconditional support to the rule of international law and the objective of peace, not to those breaching the former and destroying the latter.

Sooner or later, Council members will have to admit that the interests of their countries and those of this Israeli Government are not aligned but rather,

opposed. The sooner they recognize that, the more lives that can be saved, and the better chance we have of walking back from the abyss. It may be hard to imagine in these circumstances a different reality: the effort and energy it would take, the difficult choices it implies, the political cost it carries and the changes to policies it entails. But as we have said repeatedly, it is worth it compared to the alternative we are living in right now — the one the Palestinian people have been experiencing for decades. There can be a reality in which no Palestinians and no Israelis are killed and in which they all enjoy equal measures of freedom, peace and security. That is the reality that deserves all the Council's efforts and resources. Invest in peace, not war. Support justice, not vengeance. Stand for freedom, and do not justify continued subjugation and occupation.

Billions of people of all faiths and origins care about the fate of the Palestinian people. They measure it against all the statements and positions that the countries here make. They consider it the ultimate test for the values one proclaims, and the norms we all enact. In Gaza, under the rubble lie more than 1,000 Palestinians, along with all the values and all the norms. Under the bombs lie 2 million Palestinians, along with all the values and all the norms. Abandoning the Palestinian people is betraying those values and norms. Council members can either rescue the international-law based order or leave it there to die.

We thank all those who have taken an unequivocal position and offered support, starting with the countries of our region, who understand more than any other the implications of the continued inhumane and barbaric attacks against our people, but also countries across the globe — the people in the streets — the moral voices of the world. Please listen to them.

Council members have families, and some of them evoked them when Israelis were killed, saying how they could not help but think of their loved ones and the pain and suffering they would feel if they had endured a similar fate. I am therefore convinced that people cannot be numb to a reality in which all the people they love — their parents, grandparents, siblings, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins and in-laws — are all in danger of imminent death, or worse, have all been killed in one strike, in one instant. That is happening repeatedly. Can Council members feel their pain? Can they imagine the day after for them — or for a child who is the only surviving person left in his entire family? If so, can they imagine how we feel when anyone

claims that this is for the better? Can they imagine their loved ones besieged and bombed, deprived of the goods essential for their survival, their fate dependent on a decision to allow or prevent fuel, water and food from entering with any delay — which means a death sentence for many? Families should be reunited in life, not in death.

If Council members say that they stand for international law, international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians, then nothing can justify what Israel is doing. It amounts to the targeting of civilians or, at best, inhumane, unlawful, indiscriminate attacks. It is collective punishment. Once you remove the principles of humanity and distinction from the laws of war, nothing remains. These are crimes and should be treated as such.

What Israel is doing is consistent with its belief that we are sub-humans, or “human animals”, as they put it. But surely those in this Chamber do not share that belief. They do not believe that our lives are less worthy, less sacred or more expendable. I therefore ask everyone to imagine what they would do if bombs were falling on Israel and killing civilians by the thousands, and to then ask themselves, why is this any different? Israel has killed thousands of Palestinians over the years, and yet no one suggested that that entitled us to start killing Israeli civilians, neither under the right to defend ourselves, or to protect our own, or to resist. The message was always clear: nothing can justify killing Israeli civilians. Well, nothing justifies killing Palestinian civilians — nothing.

*(spoke in Arabic)*

Is it not the responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security and to preserve the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which makes a pledge to our peoples to save future generations from the scourge of war and to take joint and effective measures to prevent and abolish threats to peace, in line with the principles of justice and international law? Or is the Security Council unable to uphold its responsibilities and implement its mandate and resolutions without selectivity or double standards when the issue is Palestine? Is it not the role of the Security Council to address and immediately stop the aggression that targets newborn babies, men, women and children, to protect Palestinian civilians against the continued crimes of the occupation and to deal with the root causes of the problem — the



instability, insecurity and absence of peace caused by the strong will of the occupying Israeli authorities to colonize the Palestinian land and displace its people? Peace and security are contingent on empowering the Palestinian people and ensuring their enjoyment of their legitimate and inalienable rights, not on avoiding those imperatives and ignoring their suffering and humanity.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that,

“disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind”.

In that regard, I ask the members of the international community, represented by the Council: Is their human conscience not offended by the crimes that the Israeli occupation has committed for decades through its colonial occupation, as a result of which the Palestinian people are exposed to today to terrorism, killings, destruction and starvation? Are they not offended by the killing of children in Palestine through the brutal shelling that kills innocent people and targets houses, hospitals, schools, mosques, churches, journalists, health workers and United Nations employees? Are they not offended by our people’s deprivation of their humanity, or by the unacceptable statements made by Israeli officials that call for ethnic cleansing and genocide and describe the Palestinian people as children of darkness and sometimes as human animals in order to justify killing them? Is human conscience not offended by the continued blockade for 16 years against our people, causing their starvation and the prevention of the delivery of water, food, medicine, fuel and other essential supplies? Is human conscience not offended by the targeting of the civilian population in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, along with Christian and Muslim holy sites? How many Palestinian victims and children must be killed before the Council puts an end to the madness that has been unleashed?

Members should not misunderstand the situation. The devastating war against the Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip is an extension of the aggression perpetrated by the occupation against our people to continue its colonization and occupation of our land. Peace and security cannot be achieved by killing children, destroying Gaza and turning it into a hell or reducing its area, which those who are carrying out the killing and the destruction repeatedly demand. Neither will peace and security be achieved by arming thousands

of terrorist settlers to continue their terrorist attacks against our people in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The Palestinian children in Gaza are writing their names on their hands so that their corpses will be identifiable and not buried in mass graves. Israel eliminated scores of families who were deleted from the population register. That is an act of revenge directed against children, women and civilians, an act which the world had agreed to prevent and the purposes of the Charter and international law had sought to prohibit and eradicate.

Israel is taking revenge on women, children and the entire Palestinian people. They are taking revenge on the victims who continue to reject the occupation and its colonial project. The victims still demand their rights to freedom, independence and the right of return. The people remain resilient in the face of crimes and the continued brutal aggression, which has been bolstered by the hate speech and vengeance led by the occupation Government that wants to complete the crime of the Nakbah. As our great poet, Mahmoud Darwish, wrote,

“We are the victims on whom every form of killing has been tried, even the latest weapons. Yet we are the miracle that does not die and cannot die”.

The world has witnessed all kinds of killing, destruction, arrests and displacement by Israel against the Palestinian people, and has coexisted with its crimes and impunity instead of seeking a radical solution to end the occupation and its presence on the land of Palestine. Ending the occupation and realizing the rights of the Palestinian people is the only way to ensure regional and international stability, security and peace.

The serious escalation in the area has been caused mainly by the absence of rights and their neglect. Therefore, the minimum expected from the Council today is to call for an immediate ceasefire and the cessation of Israel’s aggression against our people in the Gaza Strip, as well as to urgently secure the delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip, prevent forced displacement, provide urgent international protection for the Palestinian people and achieve justice through accountability.

Furthermore, the necessary practical measures must be taken to address the root causes of the problem and end the Israeli occupation of the land of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the

peace process and international law, and to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, above all the right to self-determination and national independence and the return of the Palestinian refugees to the homes from which they were expelled, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). War and peace start in Palestine. Our area has suffered enough wars. Gaza today is the capital of the world. All eyes are fixed on Gaza. The Council should not fail the test. There is a great and a resilient people in Gaza, who have tolerated what no human can tolerate. Enough torture, enough killing, enough injustice. Long live Gaza — long live Palestine — and long live freedom so that peace may endure.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel.

**Mr. Cohen (Israel):** As we meet here today, young babies and children are being held in Gaza. This is beyond imagination. It is a living nightmare: Ofri, 10 years old; Avigail, 3 years old; Maya, 17 years old; Raz, 4 years old; Aviv, 2 years old; Ariel, 4 years old; little Kfir, only 9 months; Yuval, 8 years old; and Ofir, 17 years old. They are just a few of the many children and babies that have not seen evil, have not caused evil, but are victims of evil. These children witness horror that words cannot describe. Mr. Secretary-General, what world do you live in? This is definitely not our world.

“Do I want to remember, the creation of hell? The shouts of the raiders, enjoying the hunt. Cries of the wounded, begging for life. Faces of mothers carved with pain. Hiding children, dripping with fear? No, I don’t want to remember, but how can I forget? [...] Do I want to remember this world upside down?”

“Families vanished in the midst of the day. The mass grave steaming with vapor of blood. Mothers searching for children in vain. [...] No. I have to remember and never let you forget.”

That heart-wrenching poem was written in 1942 by Alexander Kimel, a Holocaust survivor. Five years later, the General Assembly voted in favour of the creation of the Jewish State — the birth of the State of Israel (resolution 181 (II)). Seventy-five years ago, a clear statement was made: never again. Never again.

Saturday, 7 October will go down in history as nothing less than a brutal massacre. Saturday, 7 October is a wake-up call for the entire free world. It

is a wake-up call against extremism and terror. On that day, over 1,500 terrorists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad infiltrated Israel from the south with a viciousness that exceeds even that of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), killing more than 1,400 babies, children, women and men, and wounding more than 4,000. They went from house to house, slaughtering entire families and individuals in their beds, on the streets and on their way to the synagogue, raping women, burning them alive and dancing and chanting on people’s bodies. Members were not there, and have not seen the horror or smelled it.

Let us pause for a moment and think about the many innocent people who woke up on Saturday morning. So many of them have not received a final burial. Let us recite the words of the Jewish prayer for the dead, the Kaddish:

*(spoke in a language other than an official language of the Security Council, without providing interpretation)*

*(spoke in English)*

This massacre will go down in history as more brutal than ISIS. Hamas are the new Nazis. Hamas are the new Nazis. Just as the civilized world united to defeat the Nazis, and just as the civilized world united to defeat ISIS, the civilized world has to stand united behind Israel to defeat Hamas. Let us make no mistake about the intentions of Hamas. I am sure the Secretary-General can read it. Their charter clearly calls for the destruction and elimination of the State of Israel. That will never be.

More than 220 people were taken hostage. Among the hostages are children, who have seen their parents murdered, Holocaust survivors and elderly in need of care and medicine. We call for immediate, direct access to all the hostages and their unconditional release. Present in this room is Moran Alony. Seven members of his family were taken hostage. Moran’s sisters, Sharon Alony Cunio and Danielle Alony, were kidnapped with Sharon’s husband, David, and their three-year-old twins, Emma and Yuli. While we sit here, those three-year-old twins are being held by Hamas, along with Danielle’s five-year-old daughter, Emilia. Early in the morning on Saturday, 7 October, Sharon wrote in a family group chat that there were Hamas terrorists in their home and that they were hiding in the safe room. A few minutes later, she wrote that the terrorists had set the house on fire. Since they were not able to enter the room and slaughter them, they burned the house to

make them get out. She wrote that they were choking in the safe room. A few minutes later, Moran received a private message from his sister that said, “we are dying. Help us”. The family received information that Sharon, Danielle, Emma, Yuli, Emilia, David and Ariel, David’s brother, were being held captive by Hamas terrorists in Gaza.

Here with us is another family, that of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, a young man aged 23, who was one of the beautiful and innocent participants in the music festival. Hersh is seriously injured. The last two text messages that he managed to send to his parents from his phone before he was kidnapped to Gaza were “I love you, I’m sorry”. That is what he wrote to his parents. There are other families here with us today: the families of Itai Chen, Keith and Aviva Siegel, Liat Beinon, Idan Alexander and Omer Neutra. And there are so many more.

Qatar, which finances and harbours Hamas leaders, could influence and enable the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by the terrorists. The members of the international community should demand that Qatar do just that. This meeting should conclude with the clear message: bring them home. I would like us to listen to this recording.

*An audio recording was played in the Chamber.*

That is a Hamas terrorist. What he said there, in Arabic: he was telling his mother and father that he is proud to have the blood of the 10 Jewish people whom he murdered. What a monster they gave birth to. I say to the Secretary-General: this is the world that we live in. We gave Gaza to the Palestinians to the last millimetre. There is no dispute with regard the land of Gaza. But they take the money they receive from the world and, instead of building hospitals, office buildings and commercial centres, they use it to dig tunnels and build rocket factories — not in favour of the people. That is one example. We could show all the movies that they film. They are proud of this. The lowlifes were not speaking on behalf of Islam, human values or a fight for freedom. They were speaking on behalf of cruelty, malice and hate. And everyone should ask themselves who are we up against? Israel has not only the right to defend ourselves, but we also have the duty to do so. It is not a right; it is a duty.

I want to speak to all the countries here and to tell them that the West is next. The war, which was imposed on us, is not Israel’s war only. It is the war of the free

world. I hear calls for proportionality. I hear calls, like from Ms. Hastings, for a ceasefire. Tell me — what is the proportionate response for killing babies, raping women and burning them and beheading children? How can one agree to a ceasefire with someone who swore to kill and destroy one’s own existence? The proportional response to the 7 October massacre is the total destruction to the last member of Hamas. Not only is it Israel’s right to destroy Hamas, but it is also our duty.

For Israel, it is a matter of survival. The free world should remember and never forget what happened on 7 October. Today this barbaric terror hit Israel. Tomorrow it will be at everyone’s doorstep. These terrorists do not only have Israel’s destruction in mind. Their dream is the world. Read about it. They say it, exactly like the Nazis. They are willing to expand. This war was imposed on us. We have not chosen this war, but have no doubt — we are going to win it because this war is for life. This war must be everyone’s war, as well.

As Iran’s proxy, Hamas had three objectives for its barbarous attack — murdering Jews, kidnapping hostages and derailing the expansion of peace, stability and normalization in our region. They showed united will and purpose like never before. Israel must now act in an unprecedented way to ensure that the objectives of Hamas will never be met. That is the aim.

Today is the eighteenth day since the beginning of this war. Throughout the past 18 days, our citizens have been under heavy missile and rocket fire from Gaza — and not only from Gaza. There is a clear attempt to escalate and provoke a war on our northern border. Whereas Iran proxy Hizbullah is targeting our cities, the objective of Hamas, its patron and collaborator, is clear. They will not succeed.

Israel is also facing threats from beyond neighbouring countries. Last week cruise missiles were launched at Israel from Yemen. We have no illusion who is behind it and what the reason is. I tell our Arab country and neighbour — we share the same threat of Iran and the terror organization. I stand before the Council saying loud and clear — this war will be won. And I say it for the international community to understand who is under threat and who is the aggressor.

The world now is facing a clear choice of moral clarity. One can be either part of the civilized world or surrender to the forces of evil and barbarism — Hamas

savages and their friends. There is no middle ground and no room for moral ambiguity. I want to thank all the Governments that have already designated Hamas as a terror organization, and I call on others to do so immediately.

I want to thank the United States, President Biden and Secretary Blinken for showing such moral clarity and for standing with Israel in word and deed at this dark hour. I also wish to thank the many other leader from across the world who have come to stand with Israel in this difficult time. I would like to remind the Council that the Charter of the United Nations, which was signed by all, begin with these words:

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

Today, after the most vicious and brutal terror attack in modern history, if all nations do not stand decisively and clearly by the innocent orphans left alone in the world, by the kids that were slaughtered while dancing at sunrise, by the Holocaust survivors murdered or kidnapped, by Israel on our mission to eliminate these monsters from the face of the Earth — if all nations do not stand by the basic values of humanity described in the United Nations Charter, this will be the darkest hour of the United Nations, under the Secretary-General, and this place will have no moral justification to exist. At this difficult time for the people of Israel, we say loudly — we are strong. We will rebuild. We are determined and resolved to achieve our dream — to be a free nation in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil.

I thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ms. Lynn Hastings, for their briefings.

We are witnessing unprecedented levels of violence in the region. Since 7 October, more than 5,000 lives have been lost on both sides, and more than 1 million people have fled their homes in the Gaza Strip. Allow me to quote President Lula da Silva in his appeal to reason.

“Hamas must release the Israeli children who have been abducted from their families. Israel must cease the bombing so that Palestinian children and their mothers can leave the Gaza Strip across the border with Egypt. There needs to be a minimum of humanity in the insanity of war.”

What President Lula is underscoring is that we are dealing with both a hostage and a humanitarian crisis. The acts of terrorism carried out against civilians in Israel resulted in more than 1,000 victims and the abduction of hundreds of innocent people, including children and the elderly. Three Brazilian citizens have been confirmed dead as victims of the Hamas attacks, and we deeply mourn their passing. We cannot condone acts of terrorism. Violence breeds only further violence. I therefore want to make an appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of all civilian hostages into safety, in particular women and children.

Acts of terrorism are heinous and criminal, and international law is clear on the ways to address them. The Security Council has created a significant body of counter-terrorism norms. When counter-terrorism efforts disregard basic norms and principles, including on the use of force, they reinforce the narratives of terrorist groups rather than countering them. In order to ensure an effective strategy for addressing the terrorist threat, it is therefore imperative to ensure full respect for human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law. Children must always be treated primarily as victims, in a manner consistent with their rights, dignity and needs. The escalating violence in Gaza is also unacceptable, as is the demolition of civilian infrastructure, which has resulted in the destruction of 42 per cent of civilian housing. We cannot tolerate the loss of more than 2,000 Palestinian children. As the occupying Power, Israel has a legal and moral obligation to protect the local population under international humanitarian law.

The recent events in Gaza are particularly concerning, including the so-called evacuation order, which is creating unprecedented levels of misery for innocent people. The number of trucks carrying humanitarian aid that have crossed the Rafah border is utterly insufficient to meet the basic needs of the local population. The entire territory continues to be without a power supply, which affects the work of health personnel. Hospitals are operating beyond full capacity. Access to drinkable water has been impeded and many people are resorting to unreliable sources of water. Civilians must be respected and protected

everywhere and at all times. All the parties must strictly abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law. In that respect I want to highlight the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, humanity, necessity and precaution, which must guide and inform all actions and military operations.

We must not lose sight of the root causes of the conflict — oppression, social and economic inequalities and recurring violations of human rights. This year marks 75 years since the Israel-Palestine conflict began. It is disheartening to see the lack of progress in the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis. The stalemate has been fuelling an unsettling rise in violence. Even before the crisis in Gaza, 2023 already had the highest death toll since 2005. The situation in the West Bank remains tense, with successive harmful incidents escalating into violence and leading to civilian casualties. The surge in settler-related violence is also alarming. Achieving peace requires strict adherence to international law, as well as efforts to realize a two-State solution. As the Council has clearly stated, the continued occupation of the West Bank is unlawful and undermines the prospects for peace. Israel must stop all its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The difference in the treatment of settlers and locals is unacceptable. The current and projected expansion of settlements all but erases the viability of a future Palestinian State and engenders violence and hatred. We also underscore the importance of preserving the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem and acknowledge the significance of the Hashemite custody. Brazil urges all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and abstain from provocations, including the use of extremist rhetoric.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is pivotal. We acknowledge the meetings in Egypt that are focused on exploring reconciliation efforts among the Palestinian factions and encourage the continuation of diplomatic engagement in regional peace processes. Brazil also commends the valuable humanitarian work that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is doing for one of the world's most vulnerable refugee populations, the Palestinians. We mourn the brave workers of UNRWA who have lost their lives in the line of duty since the current hostilities began. Our commitment to UNRWA is reflected in our willingness to hold the vice-chairmanship and the chairmanship of the

Agency's Advisory Commission from July 2024 and July 2025, respectively.

The broader Middle East has long been entangled in a web of conflict, and those conflicts have led to immeasurable suffering, grief, loss, hardship and, worst of all, hopelessness, and have severely destabilized the region. Now we are seeing the very real risk of the crisis in Gaza spilling over into other parts of the region.

Amid all of those daunting challenges, diplomacy and dialogue remain our most powerful assets. The maritime dispute between Israel and Lebanon has been peacefully settled through negotiations. Similarly, the recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran underscores the potential of good-faith engagement. The establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and various Arab countries also shows the stakeholders' willingness to engage and cooperate. Such endeavours bring hope for peace in the region. The League of Arab States is playing a vital role in the context by working tirelessly to mediate and foster dialogue between conflicting parties.

The Council has a crucial responsibility in the immediate response to the unfolding hostage and humanitarian crisis. The reputation of the United Nations depends in large part on its approach to this ongoing crisis. The Council has been unable to adopt a draft resolution on the situation in the region since 2016, and obstructive strategies have prevented it from taking crucial decisions on international peace and security. As a result, the situation in the Middle East is one of the most stymied issues in the Security Council. The Council must be up to the challenge before it. We, its members, will likely be tried and found guilty by future generations for our inaction and complacency. We must find ways to unlock multilateral action. Focusing on disagreements will not take us in the direction of the solutions that are so badly needed to the dire humanitarian crisis that is unfolding. The Security Council should not shy away from its responsibility to call for the liberation of the innocent people who have been abducted from their families and for their safety, well-being and humane treatment. This is a broad political call for the opening of urgently needed humanitarian corridors. A decision on the humanitarian aspects of the current crisis is within Council members' grasp, on condition that we refrain from politicizing an already complex situation on the ground.

Brazil will continue to promote dialogue among members and action on the part of the Council through the opening of possible avenues of negotiation. In that spirit, President Lula da Silva instructed me to attend the Cairo peace summit last Saturday, with an unequivocal message: to add Brazil's voice to all those that are urging calm, restraint and peace in the region. Despite the various positions of the Member States represented there, consensus was possible on the following four major objectives: an end to the violence, the implementation of a ceasefire, the establishment of humanitarian corridors and the implementation and full endorsement of the two-State solution.

Enough of strife, suffering and instability — we need all stakeholders to see their own interest through new lenses with long-term and far-sighted perspectives. We need solutions, no matter how politically difficult they may be. A peaceful and prosperous Middle East is to the benefit of us all.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

I call on the Secretary of State of the United States of America.

**Mr. Blinken** (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this ministerial meeting and for convening the Security Council. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Deputy Special Coordinator Hastings for their important briefings.

We are grateful for the Secretary-General's leadership in this incredibly challenging time, particularly in helping to get humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza. In addition, we express our gratitude and our admiration to the entire United Nations team, all of whom continue to serve in some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, for their incredible bravery and dedication.

I am here today because the United States believes that the United Nations and the Security Council in particular have a crucial role to play in addressing this crisis. Indeed, we put forward a draft resolution that sets out practical steps that we can take together to that end. The draft resolution builds on many elements of the draft resolution (S/2023/773) that Brazil put forward last week (see S/PV. 9442). It incorporates the substantive feedback that we have received from fellow Council members in recent days. It also draws heavily

on the views that I heard at first hand from partners across the region after Hamas' appalling attack on 7 October, views that the United States shares.

First, we all recognize the right, and indeed the imperative, of States to defend themselves against terrorism. That is why we must unequivocally condemn Hamas' barbaric terrorist attack against Israel — babies riddled with bullets; young people hunted down and gunned down with glee; people, young people, beheaded; families burned alive in a final embrace; parents executed in front of their children; children executed in front of their parents; and many people taken hostage in Gaza. We have to ask, and indeed it must be asked: where is the outrage? Where is the revulsion? Where is the rejection? Where is the explicit condemnation of those horrors? We must affirm the right of any nation to defend itself and to prevent such horror from repeating itself. No member of the Council — no nation in this entire Organization — could or would tolerate the slaughter of its people.

As the Council and the General Assembly have repeatedly affirmed, all acts of terrorism are unlawful and unjustifiable. They are unlawful and unjustifiable whether they target people in Nairobi or Bali, in Luxor, Istanbul or Mumbai, in New York or Kibbutz Be'eri. They are unlawful and unjustifiable, whether they are carried out by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba or Hamas. They are unlawful and unjustifiable, whether victims are targeted for their faith, their ethnicity, their nationality or any other reason, and the Council has a responsibility to denounce Member States that arm, fund and train Hamas or any other terrorist group that carries out such horrific acts.

Let us not forget that among the more than 1,400 people that Hamas killed on 7 October were citizens from more than 30 States Members of the United Nations, including many of the Council members around this table. The victims included at least 33 American citizens. Every one of us has a stake in, and every one of us has a responsibility for, defeating terrorism.

Secondly, we all agree on the vital need to protect civilians. As President Biden has made clear from the outset of this crisis, while Israel has the right, and indeed the obligation, to defend itself, the way it does so matters. We know that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people, and Palestinian civilians are not to blame for the carnage committed by Hamas. Palestinian

civilians must be protected. That means Hamas must cease using them as human shields. It is hard to think of an act of greater cynicism. It means that Israel must take all possible precautions to avoid harm to civilians. It means that food, water, medicine and other essential humanitarian assistance must be able to flow into Gaza and to the people who need them. It means that civilians must be able to get out of harm's way. It means that humanitarian pauses must be considered for those purposes.

The United States has worked relentlessly to make real those principles. We continue to coordinate closely with Egypt, Israel and partners across the region, as well as with the United Nations, to build mechanisms that will enable sustained humanitarian assistance to flow to civilians in Gaza without benefiting Hamas or any other terrorist group. President Biden appointed one of our most senior diplomats, Ambassador David Satterfield, to lead our humanitarian efforts, which he is currently doing on the ground. The United States has committed an additional \$100 million in humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, bringing the total aid that we provided to Palestinian people over the past two and a half years to more than \$1.6 billion. That makes the United States the largest single country donor, by far, to the Palestinian people. We call on all countries, particularly those with the greatest capacity to give, to join us in meeting the United Nations appeal for the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

At the heart of our efforts to save innocent lives in this conflict — and for that matter in every conflict — is our core belief that every civilian life is equally valuable. There is no hierarchy when it comes to protecting civilian lives. A civilian is a civilian is a civilian, no matter his or her nationality, ethnicity, age, gender or faith. That is why America mourns the loss of every single innocent life in this crisis, including innocent Israeli and Palestinian men, women, children and elderly people — Muslims, Jews, Christians and people of all nationalities and faiths, including at least 35 United Nations staff members. That is why it is imperative that we work to protect all civilians in this conflict and to prevent more deaths atop the many that have already occurred.

The value we place on civilian life is the driving force behind our efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza. Like others, I had the occasion to meet with the families

of those missing and suspected to be in the hands of Hamas on my recent trip. Several of them, as those present are aware, are with us in the Chamber today. None of us can imagine the nightmare they are living, something no family should have to endure. Their loved ones must be released immediately and unconditionally, and every member of the Council — indeed every Member of this Organization — should insist on that. We are grateful to Qatar, Egypt and the International Committee of the Red Cross for helping to secure the release of four of the hostages held by Hamas, but at least 200 more hostages — from many of our nations, as I mentioned — are still in the grip of Hamas. Therefore, I once again implore every member here to use its voice, its influence and its leverage to secure their unconditional and immediate release.

Thirdly, we are all determined to prevent this conflict from spreading. That goes to the principal responsibility of the Security Council — maintaining international peace and security. A broader conflict would be devastating, not only for Palestinians and Israelis, but for people across the region and, indeed, around the world. To that end, we call on all Member States to send a firm, united message to any State or non-State actor that is considering opening another front in this conflict against Israel or that may target Israel's partners, including the United States: do not throw fuel on the fire.

Members of the Council — and permanent members in particular — have a special responsibility to prevent the conflict from spreading. I look forward to continuing to work with my counterpart from the People's Republic of China to do precisely that when he visits Washington later this week.

It is no secret to anyone in the Chamber or on the Council that, for years, Iran has supported Hamas, Hizbullah, the Houthis and other groups that continue to carry out attacks on Israel. Iranian leaders have routinely threatened to wipe Israel off the map. In recent weeks, Iran's proxies have repeatedly attacked United States personnel in Iraq and Syria, whose mission is to prevent the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham from renewing its rampage.

Let me say this before the Council, and let me say what we have consistently said to Iranian officials through other channels: the United States does not seek conflict with Iran. We do not want this war to widen. But if Iran or its proxies attack United States personnel

anywhere, make no mistake: we will defend our people and we will defend our security swiftly and decisively.

If members of the Council, like the United States, want to prevent the conflict from spreading, they must tell Iran and its proxies, in public, in private, through every means, not to open another front against Israel in this conflict and not to attack Israel's partners. And we urge members to go a step further and make clear that if Iran or its proxies widen this conflict and put more civilians at risk, members will hold them accountable. Members must act as if the security and stability of the entire region and beyond is on the line — because it is.

Fourthly and finally, even as we address this immediate crisis, we all agree that we must redouble our collective efforts to build an enduring political solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The only road to lasting peace and security in the region and the only way to break out of the horrific cycle of violence is through two States for two peoples.

As President Biden has underscored from day one, Palestinians deserve equal measures of security, freedom, justice, opportunity and dignity. And Palestinians have a right to self-determination and a status of their own. We have no illusions about how hard it will be to achieve the two-State solution. But as President Biden has said, we cannot give up on peace. Indeed, it is precisely in the darkest moments, like this one, that we have to fight the hardest to preserve an alternative path and show people, making it real, that improving their lives in tangible ways is possible and indeed is necessary.

We have heard many countries express support in recent weeks for a durable political solution. Our message today is this: help us build that solution. Help us prevent the spread of a war that will make two States and broader peace and security the region even harder to achieve.

Members of the Council, we stand at a crossroads. Two paths lie before us. The difference between them could not be starker. One is the path offered by Hamas. We know where it leads — death, destruction, suffering and darkness. The other is the path towards greater peace, greater stability, greater opportunity, greater normalization and integration. It is a path towards people across the region being able to live, work, worship and learn, side by side. It is a path towards Palestinians realizing their legitimate right to self-determination in a State of their own. Nothing would be a greater victory

for Hamas than allowing its brutality to send us down its path of terrorism and nihilism. We must not let it. Hamas does not get to choose for us. The United States stands ready to work with anyone ready to forge a more peaceful and secure future for the region — a future its people yearn for and so deserve.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France.

**Ms. Colonna (France) (*spoke in French*):** I thank the Secretary-General, his Personal Representative and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and the Deputy Special Coordinator for their briefings to the Council. I welcome the Secretary-General's personal commitment, given the very worrisome and, frankly, dangerous situation. It is worrisome in terms of the humanitarian aspect and dangerous because of the risk of conflagration in the region.

The Council must act now and shoulder its responsibilities. It is its duty — it is our duty. We have the duty to unequivocally condemn the terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas and other terrorist groups against Israel — a large-scale, inhumane and reprehensible attack, and an attack on civilians, who were murdered in cold blood, tortured and raped. No one can challenge the fact that on 7 October, Hamas, a terrorist group, launched an offensive against a Member State of the United Nations — Israel.

France was also affected by the terrorist attack — 30 of our citizens lost their lives, and nine others are missing or being held hostage. I reiterate our call for all hostages to be released immediately, without conditions. Children, including French children, are presumably being held hostage today in Gaza. No one in the Council must accept that. All hostages must be released.

In the light of the attack, I would like to reiterate that France stands in solidarity with Israel and firmly supports its security. Israel has the right to security. Israel has the right to defend itself and protect its people so that such an attack never happens again. The President of the French Republic reiterated that today in Israel. I went there nine days ago and saw the pain and the suffering of the Israeli people.

Israel has the right to defend itself, the duty to do so — while respecting international law, in particular international humanitarian law — and therefore to protect civilians. We all also know that Hamas does not at all represent Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, where



Hamas reigns with terror and holds the population hostage, it only brings suffering and violence from the fighting and a horrific humanitarian crisis.

Given the humanitarian crisis, our duty, and that of Israel, is to ensure that civilians, including women and children in Gaza, are provided, on an ongoing basis, with basic necessities, such as water, food, medicine and fuel. Civilian lives must be protected. Any loss of civilian life is a tragedy. To that end, we must ensure safe, swift, unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip. We must also ensure respect for international humanitarian law and its principles, which I would recall here: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Lastly, we must also call for a humanitarian truce that, ultimately, will lead to a ceasefire. I talked about that in Cairo on Friday, at the Cairo peace summit, organized by Egypt, whose efforts I commend. Our Prime Minister reiterated it yesterday in the French Parliament.

Since Saturday, several humanitarian convoys were able to enter Gaza through the Rafah border crossing. More of them must continue to enter Gaza. The Secretary-General has rightly said that the entry of those trucks is a matter of life and death for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. The number of those convoys must be increased. More must be done, as the needs are immense. Every civilian counts. Every minute counts.

France is committed to addressing the humanitarian emergency. Just as the European Union has done, France has increased its humanitarian assistance. Since 7 October, it has contributed €20 million in additional humanitarian aid for the population of Gaza, through the efforts of United Nations agencies, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian non-governmental organizations. I pay tribute to them, as well as to the resolute efforts of the Secretary-General. France is also chartering a special flight with 50 tons of emergency humanitarian aid for the Palestinians to assist the efforts undertaken by Egypt, which we encourage. Our total assistance to the Palestinians will thus reach nearly €110 million by 2023.

We also have a duty to prevent a conflagration in the region. France is committed to preventing the spread of this conflict. Certain players must refrain from attempting to take advantage of the current situation. We are telling them in no uncertain terms. We are

warning them against any interference in the conflict, which could trigger a downward spiral. A conflagration would not benefit anyone in the region or beyond.

The gravity of the situation reminds us that among our duties is the essential duty to pave the way for peace. We must take action to recreate the conditions conducive to a lasting political solution that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and the Israelis to live in peace — not pitted against each other, but side by side. The conditions for this lasting peace are well known. They are indispensable guarantees to Israel for its security and a State for the Palestinians. The only viable solution is a two-State solution. That is what France has always defended and will continue to defend. I reiterated that in Cairo on Saturday. President Macron will say it again today to the Israelis, Palestinians and regional partners.

We must continue to support the Palestinian Authority and even strengthen it with a view to a decisive renewal of the political process with all parties involved. The President of France wanted to go to Ramallah today after his meetings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. He just arrived and is meeting with President Abbas at this very moment. We must all mobilize to find a political path forward. The Security Council must be able to exercise its responsibility in that regard. It is high time that it unambiguously condemn Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel; call for respect for international law, including humanitarian law; and demand the delivery of aid to the people of Gaza. That is why France voted in favour of draft resolution S/2023/773 presented by Brazil — and I thank for Brazil for its commitment and efforts — and why France will continue to support any Council initiative that is fair and based on our common principles. The Council must act now.

The Charter of the United Nations entered into force 78 years ago today. We are here to serve it and to serve the cause of peace. On this difficult day, France calls on everyone to shoulder their responsibilities before the Charter of the United Nations and humankind.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon.

**Mr. Onanga Ndiaye (Gabon)** (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open ministerial debate at a time when the situation in the Middle East continues to worsen and requires the utmost attention from the international community. I would like to take this opportunity to

congratulate you, Sir, on Brazil's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of October. I also would like to welcome the participation of Secretary-General António Guterres in this debate and commend his efforts in support of the Middle East peace process. I have closely followed the enlightening briefings by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, and the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ms. Lynn Hastings.

The horrifying attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October are a tipping point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The toll of the fighting between Israel and Hamas is rising daily, with thousands of dead and wounded, people kidnapped and atrocities committed against women, children and older persons.

Gabon, my country, reiterates its firm condemnation of those barbaric acts and urges the kidnappers to release all hostages. We are encouraged by the release of two American hostages on 20 October, followed by two Israeli hostages on 23 October. We recognize Israel's right to self-defence, but in accordance with the principles of proportionality, precaution and distinction.

With the siege of Gaza, the scale of human distress has become unbearable. Indiscriminate air strikes have caused thousands of deaths and untold destruction in the space of a few days. The recent attacks on Gaza's Orthodox Church and Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza are a terrible reflection of an escalation of violence that knows no bounds.

Gabon, my country, condemns the violence against civilian infrastructure and recalls that health units and their personnel must be respected and protected in all circumstances, in accordance with international humanitarian law. We would like to pay a heartfelt tribute to the humanitarian workers who are carrying out their activities with dedication in often hostile conditions at the risk of their lives.

Still on the humanitarian front, we are closely following the delivery of aid to the Gaza Strip at the Rafah crossing, which began on 21 October. That is a glimmer of hope for the millions of Gazan people trapped in the vise-like grip of the warring parties without drinking water, food, gas, fuel or electricity. In that respect, we welcome the efforts of Egypt and the United States, and call for the continuous opening of that crossing point, given the critical situation on the ground.

Faced with its responsibilities, our Council was unable to overcome its divisions. Gabon voted in favour of the most recent draft resolutions S/2023/772 and S/2023/773 on this topic, driven by a deep desire to put an end to the abuses and to protect civilians. We regret that our Council was unable to reach a consensus. The immediate cessation of hostilities and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid to people in need are vital and urgent. We must work further to silence the guns and reach a lasting solution commensurate with the gravity of the crisis. Gabon believes that it is high time that humanity took precedence over political and geopolitical alliances.

Clearly, the current conflict cannot be understood solely in terms of the events of the past few days. It is essential to examine the underlying causes. The continued policy of settlement expansion, demolitions and evictions, in particular in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the blockade of Gaza, religious provocations, terrorist attacks on Israeli soil, the recurrence of bellicose rhetoric and the freezing of tax revenues collected by Israel from Palestinian Authority workers on behalf of the Palestinian Authority are major obstacles to building of comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The clear violations of international law and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 1860 (2009) and 2334 (2016), must cease.

In view of the aforementioned, Gabon reaffirms its commitment to the two-State solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living side by side, on the basis of internationally recognized borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Furthermore, with a view to the peaceful coexistence of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, Gabon also recalls its attachment to respect for the status quo of the holy sites of Jerusalem and recognizes the crucial role of the Kingdom of Jordan as the official custodian of the Muslim holy sites of Jerusalem.

The escalation of hostilities puts us in the context of war whose impact on the region is inevitable. We must prevent the situation from turning into a stalemate and prevent the emergence of new fronts in the region, especially in the West Bank and southern Lebanon, which would make the situation in the region even more volatile. Gabon takes note of the peace summit held in Cairo on 21 October, and urges regional and international players with influence over the parties

to give greater support to all initiatives aimed at establishing dialogue and peace in the Middle East.

In conclusion, on this critical day for the United Nations, my country reaffirms its conviction that diplomacy, dialogue and negotiations, with the United Nations playing a central role, are the sole and indispensable channels for achieving a lasting solution to this conflict that will uphold the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and Israel's legitimate right to security.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania.

**Mr. Hasani** (Albania): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this high-level meeting and for inviting me here today. I also thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their sober descriptions of the situation on the ground.

The terrible events of 7 October represent the deadliest single attack in Israel's history. Albania stands firmly with Israel — as we do with every other nation under attack — in support of its legitimate right to self-defence, in accordance with international humanitarian law. In such difficult and defining moments, Israel and its people need the support of the community of free nations in responding to terrorists who have committed horrible crimes and continue to question its right to exist. We profoundly believe that there is a way to ensure the security of Israel and the protection of innocent civilians. Innocent lives matter equally, be they Israeli or Palestinian. That is why every measure and precaution must be taken not to harm those who do not deserve it — those whose lives have been put in danger by Hamas and other terrorists and extremists.

Hamas and its leaders, who live a comfortable life outside Gaza, as well as their supporters, knew very well what they were doing when they unleashed the beasts to kill, burn, massacre and kidnap everyone they could. They were hoping to trigger a massive response from Israel, knowing very well that civilians would be caught in the middle. Their hope and their win would be to make the world turn against Israel. But we must not be fooled. There is only one party that is rejoicing about what is happening. It is the country known to sponsor terrorism in Gaza, the West Bank, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and anywhere it can. It is the country that is known for destabilizing the entire Middle East and that continues to do so.

Albania condemns any justification and glorification of the terrorist attacks. It is crystal clear that the aim of Hamas is not to protect the Palestinians. Its actions do not represent them. It is therefore high time for all Palestinians to realize that their fight for self-determination, their dream of statehood and their aspirations for a better life in security and dignity will never be realized with the likes of Hamas. They must be the first to turn the against acts of horror — the unacceptable and the unjustifiable. Hamas is denying them their present, and it is stealing their future.

Developments in the Middle East have always resonated around the world. They unleash strong passions and emotions. We are worried about the frightening increase in the level of antisemitism, which is fuelled by hatred, misinformation and disinformation and has been propelled to very dangerous levels, in particular through social media. Antisemitism has never disappeared, but what we are seeing today is simply unacceptable. We should not stay indifferent in the face of calls and behaviour that are taken from the Nazi playbooks. We must not let the fabric of our societies be torn apart by misconceptions, hate speech, discrimination and the revival of the despicable behaviour that produced one of the darkest moments in human history. We said “never again”, but we must keep to that, be vigilant, react and fight for it and against all those who fan the flames of division and discrimination.

As we heard, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is dramatic. We condemn the attack on Al Ahli Hospital last Tuesday and call for a full investigation of those responsible for that act. We welcome the arrangements made so far to allow humanitarian convoys into Gaza with water, food and medical supplies. Although much more is needed to meet the needs of those affected, efforts must continue, and diplomacy must always prevail. We commend the efforts of Egypt, the United States, Israel and the Secretary-General in that regard. Humanitarian aid for civilians should flow unhindered to all those in need, and the provision of fuel and the restoration of electricity must be ensured. The normal and unhindered flow of humanitarian assistance must be guaranteed through humanitarian pauses.

We welcome the release of hostages and every effort in that respect deserves praise. Civilians should have never been kidnapped in the first place, and all of them must be released unconditionally. Last but by no means least, everything must be done to avoid a spillover of the conflict, which would destabilize the entire

Middle East. We condemn the Hizbullah attacks on Israel and call on the group to refrain from unprovoked actions and fully comply with resolution 1701 (2006). Provocative, threatening and inciting rhetoric does not help. It is time to act with maturity, with messages of caution and responsibility.

Israel needs and deserves security. Palestinians need and deserve their State. The issue of Palestine should not continue to remain unfinished business that poisons international life and serves as a false pretext for the extremists and terrorists who use it for other aims and gains. There is an urgent need to bring back a perspective for the future, especially for Gaza, once the hostilities are over. Albania reiterates its support for two States for two peoples — a democratic and viable Palestine and a secure Israel, living side by side in peace and security and in full recognition, with their people enjoying equal rights and dignity.

In conclusion, I would like to express Albania's support for the draft resolution put forward by the United States, which addresses all the core pertinent issues and on which we hope the Security Council will show unity.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta.

**Mr. Borg (Malta):** I thank the Secretary-General and the briefers for their briefings.

The situation in the Middle East has been precariously fragile and unsustainable for too long. Discussions in this Chamber in that regard have often focused on the violent escalations, unilateral measures, injustice, socioeconomic inequality, human rights violations, dangerous rhetoric, hate speech and other warning signs. It was evident that volatile situation had been pushing the conflict to a precarious edge. Our worst fears were realized on 7 October, when Hamas committed a despicable and deplorable terror attack against Israel, which we have condemned without reservation. The situation has now already resulted in the deaths of thousands and affected thousands more.

Malta acknowledges Israel's right to self-defence and its duty and responsibility to protect its people. At the same time, we also emphasize that such actions must be consistent with its obligations under international humanitarian law and in line with the principles of distinction and proportionality.

At the beginning of the current crisis, we had underlined the need for steps in the right direction. In that context, we welcome the news that four hostages have been released and greatly appreciate the efforts by all involved to that end. We call on Hamas to release all remaining hostages safely, unconditionally and without further delay.

We are also gravely concerned about the current humanitarian situation in Gaza. Thousands of Palestinians have been killed, many of whom are civilians, including women and children. Scores more are likely still buried under the rubble of levelled neighbourhoods.

Malta condemns all attacks against civilians, United Nations personnel, medical and humanitarian workers, religious sites and civilian infrastructure. We call for an independent investigation into the blast at Al Ahli Baptist Hospital on 18 October, and we stress that whoever is responsible must be held accountable. International humanitarian law must be respected by all. We are deeply concerned about Israel's decision to cut off the supply of water, electricity, food and fuel into Gaza, which is having dire humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. It will inevitably lead to a public-health catastrophe, owing to the compounding effects of mass displacement, inadequate sanitation and water-borne diseases. The parties must adhere to their obligations to allow the safe, rapid, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing and to establish humanitarian corridors and safe zones. We commend the efforts made by the United Nations, the United States and Egypt in that regard. We must also note that the conflict has already had a disproportionate effect on women and children on both sides. More than 200 people, including women and children, are being held hostage by Hamas. Internally displaced women and girls in Gaza are at a greater risk of gender-based violence, including sexual and psychological violence. It is in view of those extraordinary levels of suffering that Malta strongly reiterates its call for the establishment of an immediate humanitarian pause.

The legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people should not be confused with the aims of the terrorist group of Hamas. It is crucial that the distinction be made clear to all in order to avoid further inflammatory polarization and the potential for regional escalation. Nor can we lose sight of the West Bank. There has been a sharp increase in the killing, violence and forced

displacement of Palestinians since 7 October, including through settler violence and hundreds of arrests. We call on the parties to de-escalate and exercise the utmost restraint. Avoiding further conflict fronts, particularly on the Israeli-Lebanese border and in the West Bank, is critical to regional peace. Parties with influence must take steps to achieve a dialogue that promotes peace. In that vein, I would like to once again recall the importance of adequate measures to suppress the financing of terrorism. Ensuring that terrorist groups do not have access to financing is a basic condition for promoting peace.

In conclusion, Malta remains committed to a lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East — a peace that is based on a two-State solution along the pre-1967 borders, addressing the legitimate aspirations of both sides, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States living side by side in peace and security, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. I reiterate our call for de-escalation and ensuring the safe and immediate release of all hostages. Ultimately, the only viable path towards peace remains clear — a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict where violent acts have no place.

**Ms. Tisaffi** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Secretary-General, Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and his Deputy, Ms. Lynn Hastings, for their important briefings. The presence of many Foreign Ministers and other high representatives of Member States attests to the gravity of the situation.

As the State depositary of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland has made the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law priorities during its term on the Security Council. We are committed to seeing a Council that even in an emergency—in fact, especially in an emergency—makes respect for international humanitarian law a priority. Since 7 October Switzerland has firmly condemned the acts of terror, the indiscriminate firing of rockets against Israel's population and Hamas's taking of hostages. All the hostages held in Gaza must be treated humanely and released immediately and unconditionally. From the beginning of the crisis, we have also acknowledged Israel's legitimate claim to ensuring its national defence and security. International humanitarian law takes into account legitimate security needs and

military necessity. We want to remind the parties of the binding nature of all of its rules, without exception, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities.

Well before 7 October, we in the Council had been discussing the death toll, which was already reaching appalling levels. Today we are mourning the victims of Hamas's acts of terror and the deaths of thousands of civilians, including thousands of children, in Israel and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We offer our deepest condolences to their loved ones. Many people were killed and injured last week when the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza was struck. Switzerland joined the Secretary-General in unequivocally condemning the incident and has called for an investigation to shed light on the facts.

It is imperative to protect the civilians and people who are no longer part of the hostilities. They must be protected from acts of terror in Israel and they must be protected in Gaza and the West Bank, where the increase in violence, particularly by settlers, is worrisome. We also stress the need to investigate all violations of international law so that those responsible can be brought to justice. Two weeks after the start of hostilities, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic. Gazans, including the 1.5 million of them who are displaced, are in urgent need of assistance and protection. Right now they are completely besieged, deprived of water, electricity and essential services. The ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide shelter and hospital capacity has been completely overwhelmed. In response to that emergency, I am pleased to announce that Switzerland has decided to rapidly disburse additional funds to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is vital that sufficient levels of aid continue to enter Gaza and that rapid, full, safe and unhindered access is allowed and facilitated in accordance with international humanitarian law. Humanitarian pauses are also essential.

We must exert our influence on the parties to prevent a further escalation of the conflict and its potential spread throughout the region. That also requires calling for respect for international humanitarian law, which is key to halting the spiral of violence. Humanitarian action and crisis management are imperative, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the only foundation on which peace and stability can be built is a two-

State solution — two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, in peace, within secure and recognized borders, as envisaged by the Council.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister of State for Security of the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Tugendhat** (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this ministerial meeting of the Security Council. I also thank the Secretary-General, the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for their briefings. I welcome the Israeli and Palestinian Foreign Ministers to the Chamber.

The past 17 days have shocked all of us around this table who value the dignity of human life. It is a reminder of the solemn responsibility we carry to uphold peace and security across the world. Israel is a nation in mourning. It is also a nation still under attack. The violence did not end on 7 October. Terrorist rockets are still raining down on civilian towns and cities in Israel. Around 200 of Israel's citizens are still being held hostage in Gaza. Some of those are fellow British citizens. Some of the families were in this Chamber only a few moments ago. Israel has the right to defend itself and the duty to protect all those on its territory, of whatever religion they may be, from terrorism.

We recognize that Palestinians are suffering too. Thousands have been killed in this conflict. Over 1 million have been displaced. We know that Hamas is using innocent Palestinian children, civilians and others as human shields. They have embedded themselves in civilian communities. Hamas cares more for the opinions of their paymasters in Tehran than they do for the opinions of their fellow citizens. We know they fire rockets that often fall short, killing and injuring innocent Palestinians. Those people are victims of Hamas too. It is a terrorist organization that is not just a threat to Israel and Palestinians, but to many others in the region.

The United Kingdom stands resolutely with Israel in defending itself against terror. We are clear that it must act in line with international humanitarian law and take every possible step to avoid harming civilians. We have given that message to Israel as a friend and ally, and we restate that position in the Council.

We must urgently get more humanitarian support into Gaza. Sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access

must be allowed so civilians can receive life-saving support as quickly and as effectively as possible. We welcome the news that the Rafah crossing opened to aid trucks in recent days. That was an important first step and testament to the power of diplomacy. However, it is not enough. As the Secretary-General has said, humanitarian access needs to be sustainable and at scale. A constant stream of aid — water, fuel, medicine and food — is desperately needed. The United Kingdom is doing its part and has committed \$37 million of extra support to help civilians in Gaza.

We must prevent this conflict from sparking conflict beyond Gaza and engulfing the wider region in war. The attacks by Hizbullah terrorists on Israel's northern border, rising tensions in the West Bank and missiles and drones launched from Yemen all warn of the conflagration that is possible. It is in the interest of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and all States in the region, that this conflict does not spread further. That is why my Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have been in the region, engaging closely with our friends and partners to avoid escalation. Now is the time for dogged diplomacy that recognizes the hard realities and delivers help now.

Lastly, the long-standing position of the United Kingdom on the Middle East peace process remains clear: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. The events of the past week show — with total clarity — the need to achieve those goals. Hope and humanity must win out.

**The President:** I now call on the Minister of State for International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates.

**Ms. Al Hashimy** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his important statement. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland and Ms. Hastings for their detailed briefings and important efforts during this time.

Our region is witnessing one of the most difficult crises in its modern history. In the light of those critical developments, I would like to highlight the following key points, which must be our top priorities today.

First, every diplomatic effort must be made and all capabilities must be harnessed to achieve an immediate and sustainable ceasefire. The continuous escalation of Israel's bombing of the Gaza Strip confirms that any

delay in ending this war will lead to more casualties, further destruction and the threat of the conflict spilling over into the region, in particular as armed and extremist groups operating in the region will make every effort to exploit this conflict to achieve their destructive agendas.

We have recently seen growing tensions in the region, including in southern Lebanon, the occupied Syrian Golan and the Red Sea. An unchecked slide into regional war risks ominous outcomes that will not only threaten regional security but will also extend beyond, affecting stability around the world. Therefore, regional and international efforts must focus on de-escalation and restoring calm as soon as possible. In that regard, we welcome the Cairo peace summit held last Saturday, during which we heard growing calls for a ceasefire. We also value the tireless diplomatic efforts made by countries of the region and international actors.

Secondly, the immediate, safe, sustainable and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid must be allowed to enter the Gaza Strip in a manner that meets basic and necessary needs. The long-standing and unjust blockade must also end in order to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the shutting down of electricity, water and food. The shortage in medical supplies and deterioration of the health sector place patients and premature babies in imminent danger. Fuel must also be allowed in, as it is essential for operating hospitals and water facilities and other necessities.

We appreciate the extensive efforts made by the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United Nations to support the delivery of aid through the Rafah crossing, which resulted in the delivery of several shipments of international aid to Gaza over the past four days. We also stress the need to continue working to deliver more aid into the Gaza Strip, in particular as the number of trucks that have crossed into the Gaza Strip in recent days is very small and does not meet the massive needs on the ground — it represents only 4 per cent of the aid that used to enter before the outbreak of this crisis.

Thirdly, as the Secretary-General mentioned, wars have laws, the protection of civilians being foremost among them. So far, more than 5,000 Palestinians, including 2,000 children, have been killed. More than 60 per cent of the Gaza population has been displaced in search of shelter, and no place is safe. In addition,

forty-three per cent of Gaza's housing units have been destroyed, according to the United Nations.

As we have stressed since the beginning of this crisis, Israel must not target civilians and civilian objects, including hospitals, schools and United Nations facilities. In that regard, we condemn the killing of a large number of journalists, humanitarian workers and medical personnel, and we stress the need to protect them in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We reiterate that the attacks launched by Hamas on 7 October are barbaric and heinous, and we demand that Hamas immediately and unconditionally release the hostages in order to stop the bloodshed and spare all civilians further suffering. At the same time, the crimes of Hamas against civilians can never justify Israel's policy of collective punishment towards the Gaza Strip. Israel must respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians.

We reiterate our unequivocal rejection of Israel's order to evacuate more than 1 million people from northern to southern Gaza, and we demand that the order be rescinded. We also warn against any attempt to forcibly displace the Palestinian people from their land because that could lead to a new Nakba.

As we continue to work to stop this war, we must not view it in isolation from the situation that has existed in the Palestinian occupied territory for nearly six decades and the escalations we have witnessed recently. The Gaza Strip has been under siege for nearly 17 years, suffering from hunger, poverty and unemployment. Since last year, the West Bank has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of deaths and attacks by settlers, whose violence against Palestinian civilians has become widespread. That includes the announcement of the construction of thousands of new settlement units, the continued demolitions of property, the displacement of thousands, the grave threat of annexation plans and ongoing attacks on Palestinian towns and villages. This year, Jerusalem has also witnessed an increase in incursions into the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque by extremists and members of the Israeli Government, under protection of Israeli security forces.

Creating an environment of peace and stability depends, first and foremost, on the cessation of all illegal practices, the adoption of confidence-building measures, the resumption of a serious and credible negotiation process, the preservation of the legal and

historical status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites and respect for the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as the custodian of the holy sites and endowments in the city.

In conclusion, recent events have demonstrated the urgent need to move beyond the futile approaches to manage this conflict. More than 50 years ago, when the 1967 war broke out, the Council delayed the adoption of a ceasefire draft resolution to end the war, which resulted in the creation of the longest military occupation, which continues to this day. Should we leave the people of the region to live in a series of wars, violence and hatred accumulated from one generation to the next?

To avoid that, the United Arab Emirates stresses the need to adopt a draft resolution calling for an immediate and sustainable humanitarian ceasefire and, subsequently, to work seriously to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to this conflict so as to enable both peoples to live in lasting peace and security.

The United Arab Emirates will continue its call for dialogue, peaceful coexistence and cooperation as the path to stability in the region. Today we ask the Council to support that vision in order to achieve the aspirations of the peoples of the region for progress and prosperity.

Today humankind is facing a critical test. As responsible and conscious leaders, especially in the Council, we must succeed in that test by advancing the option of peace and reviving the two-State solution, which is needed today more than ever in order to achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. That requires confronting and addressing the current crisis instead of just managing it. It is illogical to repeat the same approach to this conflict and to expect different results.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Secretary-General, as well as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland and Ms. Lynn Hastings, for their substantive briefings on the situation in the Middle East region.

We believe it is important to note that in these difficult times, the Secretary-General went to the region in order to personally undertake efforts to reach a settlement and provide a humanitarian response to what is happening.

Unfortunately, today's debate is taking place not only on United Nations Day, but also against the backdrop of an unprecedented outbreak of violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone, which has caused a catastrophic increase in the number of civilian casualties on both sides.

According to the latest data, as a result of the 7 October hostilities, thousands of Israelis and Palestinians have died, and some 18,000 people have been injured. Among the victims are 19 Russians. I will not repeat the statistics, as we heard the most current data from Mr. Tor Wennesland, indicating that the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip has exceeded all conceivable limits.

The violence and killings that Israeli civilians experienced on 7 October are unjustifiable. We offer our most sincere condolences to the families of the victims. The taking of hostages was unacceptable, and they must be released. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated episode. This terrible act and the tragic events that followed in the region are the result of Washington's long-term destructive position of sabotaging solutions to the most fundamental issues affecting this protracted conflict and its desire to replace goodwill participation in the Middle East peace process with the promotion of palliative economic measures. We have seen with our own eyes that such measures do not meet the challenges of establishing peace and stability in the Middle East region. This also had an impact on the unilateral steps taken in Jerusalem, in violation of Security Council decisions, including settlement encroachment, as well as undermining the status of Jerusalem holy sites. Let us have a look on what we have said on the topic of the Middle East settlement. Along with many others, we have been warning for several years now that the situation is on the brink of explosion, and then the explosion occurred.

The current crisis has once again shown that without a just settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, on the basis of the two-State solution and approved international decisions, regional stabilization will remain an unattainable goal. Russia's position remains fundamental and consistent — there is a need to establish a sustainable negotiation process on a United Nations-approved platform, which should result in the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel.



The Council must take that into consideration in the future, otherwise it will be impossible to avoid the recurrence of similar situations. Nevertheless, we are all now facing a more urgent challenge: to put an end to the violence and ensure humanitarian access to the people of Gaza, who have suffered indiscriminate strikes by Israel and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law.

For those purposes, on 16 October we submitted a draft resolution (S/2023/772) demanding that urgent measures be taken with a view to putting an end to the violence, ensuring the immediate release of hostages, preventing a humanitarian disaster in Gaza and keeping the conflict from spilling over into the region. About 30 countries co-sponsored that draft resolution, including 17 Arab States.

Unfortunately, due to Washington's negative position on the draft resolution submitted by Russia and the draft resolution subsequently submitted by Brazil (S/2023/773), the Council once again failed to realize its main purpose as defined by the Charter of the United Nations, namely, to maintain international peace and security. The result was clear — continued escalation, accompanied by a rise in civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. After the Council failed to adopt our draft resolution (see S/PV.9439), there was a terrible attack on Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza.

During the Security Council's negotiations of draft resolutions on Gaza, a common denominator was identified that we could build on to develop a much-needed common position of the Council with regard to the events in the Gaza Strip. It comprises a set of humanitarian requirements for the parties to the conflict, with the involvement of United Nations humanitarian agencies and other humanitarian actors on the ground in their implementation. We are convinced that the key requirement is to establish a ceasefire as soon as possible. To fail to incorporate such an element in a Council outcome would be a step in the wrong direction, as it could be interpreted as Council support for Israel's plans to conduct a ground offensive in Gaza.

We deem such a scenario to be unacceptable, given the positions of not only the Arab and Islamic States but also the majority of countries in the global South. We understand the emotional state of the people of Israel, who feel rage and indignation at the shocking and horrific loss of so many of their compatriots. Nonetheless, the history of the Middle East unmistakably

shows that violence begets nothing but violence. That vicious circle must be broken. Any prospective military actions by Israel in Gaza, if conducted in the manner that we are currently witnessing that is characterized by gross violations of international humanitarian law and mass civilian casualties, risk provoking a larger-scale conflict that could encompass the entire region and even beyond.

We would like to believe that none of the members of the Security Council are interested in that; however, the recent steps taken by our American colleagues leave room for doubt. For example, after having vetoed the humanitarian draft resolution submitted by Brazil, which would otherwise have received the necessary support, the United States delegation attempted to put forward a new draft resolution that is full of politicized, inappropriate and highly questionable provisions. In order to make it easier for the allies of the United States in the Security Council to swallow the bitter pill and vote in favour of the proposed text, the authors packed it with a number of arbitrary humanitarian measures that Israel could agree to in the course of its ground operation. They also sought to ensure that nothing in the draft resolution would prevent West Jerusalem from conducting such an operation.

We are firmly convinced that the message that the entire world now awaits from the Security Council is a call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire by the parties to the conflict. However, that is exactly what the draft resolution put forward by the United States does not contain. Therefore, we see no point in that draft resolution and will not be able to support it. We trust that the majority of our colleagues on the Security Council will follow our example.

In order for the Security Council to be able to fulfil its main purpose, we have prepared an alternative draft resolution, based on agreed humanitarian language and incorporating important elements of the draft resolution prepared by the United States, the draft resolution previously submitted by Brazil and the draft resolution previously submitted by Russia. Frankly, we see no reason why the members of the Security Council would fail to support it, unless the implementation of a ceasefire and putting an end to the latest spiral of violence is not part of their plan at all.

We request the Brazilian presidency to put to a vote the draft resolution we have proposed immediately after putting to a vote the draft resolution proposed by

the United States — unless our American colleagues would prefer to withdraw their draft resolution — and we would like to open it for co-sponsorship by the wider United Nations membership. We count on their support, which would enable the Security Council to send the necessary message and prevent the further spread of the conflict.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning and by reiterating Ecuador's recognition and support for his efforts, which are more valuable and necessary than ever. We would also like to thank Mr. Wennesland and Ms. Hastings for their briefings.

Today's open debate offers the Council a valuable opportunity to listen to the views of the United Nations membership. It could not be timelier, given the recent events of which we are all aware. For that reason, I will be brief.

Six days ago in this Chamber, I expressed my position on the serious escalation of violence in the Middle East and called on all actors to show restraint, avoid exacerbating tensions and prevent a spillover of violence into other areas (see S /PV.9443). Likewise, while condemning the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas and recognizing Israel's right to defend its population, I recalled that in the exercise of self-defence, the principles of international humanitarian law must be respected at all times. I also joined the calls to allow rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access so as to supply Gazans with what they need to survive. In that same vein, we have condemned and condemn once again today the use of civilians as human shields.

We value the efforts of the Secretary-General and all those who have made the entry of humanitarian aid possible this weekend. We hope that aid arrives in the necessary quantities and with the necessary opportunities to alleviate the desperate situation of civilians in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, we welcome the release of some hostages and once again demand that all hostages taken by Hamas be released immediately and without any conditions.

Despite those advances, the situation remains extremely grave. The requests made last Wednesday are not only still valid but are becoming more urgent every day. The situations in the West Bank and on the Lebanon-Israel border are of particular concern.

The Council must not become an arena for rivalry but rather a space in which peace can be built. Peace in the Middle East is one of the main pending issues on the Council's agenda. After almost eight decades of conflict marked by thousands and thousands of deaths, the immeasurable pain and suffering of entire generations provide the clearest evidence that violence is not the solution.

The history of the Israel-Palestine conflict must no longer be one of missed opportunities. For that reason, I want to reiterate what my delegation has repeated on countless occasions in the Council, the General Assembly and other forums. The only way to end this conflict is through a peaceful, negotiated, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to welcome you, Sir, as you preside over today's meeting, and to thank Secretary-General Guterres, Special Coordinator Wennesland and Ms. Hastings for their briefings.

This meeting is very timely. We have heard many voices of justice. The tensions between Palestine and Israel have gripped the world's attention since 7 October, and as we speak, the armed conflict keeps escalating. The situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, and the lives of more than 2 million innocent people in Gaza are hanging by a thread. Civilian casualties are rising with every passing minute. The eyes of the entire world are on this Chamber. We call on the Security Council to collectively take responsible and meaningful actions without delay and send an unequivocal, powerful and united message.

First, pursuing a comprehensive ceasefire is an absolute priority and must be achieved without delay. That is the call made by Secretary-General Guterres. That is the appeal made by the leaders of Arab countries at the Cairo summit on 21 October. That is the plea made by the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian agencies working on the ground in Gaza, helping the local population. It is also a powerful demand from millions of ordinary people in Gaza and around the world.

In the light of the overwhelming call from the international community, the Security Council must

use clear and unambiguous language to demand an immediate ceasefire. It must be pointed out that whatever the justification may be, if the fighting in Gaza is allowed to continue and escalate, the final outcome will not be a complete military victory for either side. Instead, the situation will very likely evolve into a catastrophe that will consume the entire region, completely dashing the prospects for a two-State solution and plunging the Palestinian and Israeli peoples into a perpetual vicious cycle of hatred and confrontation. That scenario runs counter to the goal that we have just heard representatives around this Chamber endorse, which is preventing a spillover of the situation. States should uphold their moral conscience rather than cling to geopolitical calculations, let alone double standards. The Security Council must do everything in its power for peace instead of resorting to convoluted language and implicitly giving a green light to further escalation and acts that put more civilians in harm's way.

Secondly, preventing an even greater humanitarian catastrophe must be the top priority for all ongoing efforts. Gaza has been without power for 15 consecutive days. Water and fuel supplies have been cut off, and food, medicine and other basic necessities are about to run out. We appreciate the efforts made by Egypt and other countries in the region, as well as by Secretary-General Guterres, to open humanitarian corridors. However, the humanitarian supplies currently being allowed to enter Gaza are a drop in the bucket, and it is impossible to effectively meet Gaza's humanitarian needs through the Rafah crossing alone. The Security Council should use the most unequivocal language possible in requiring the occupying Power to immediately lift the full siege of Gaza, restore water, electricity and fuel supplies and cease the collective punishment of the population there. We urge Israel to create favourable conditions for the normal operations of the Rafah crossing, stop air strikes on its surrounding areas and ensure safe and unimpeded channels for aid. China has provided emergency humanitarian assistance through the Palestinian Authority and United Nations agencies, and will continue to provide in-kind assistance based on the needs of the people in Gaza.

Thirdly, it is imperative to uphold the red line of international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians. The fresh conflict between Palestine and Israel has resulted in appalling civilian casualties. The values of life and conscience seem to pale into powerlessness before these repeated and indiscriminate

attacks. The Security Council must resolutely defend the rule of law at the international level, unequivocally condemning all violence and attacks against civilians and opposing any acts in violation of international law. China calls for diplomatic efforts to secure the immediate release of detained hostages. At the same time, it should be pointed out that indiscriminate attacks and use of force are unacceptable. Civilian facilities such as hospitals and schools are not and should never become targets in military operations. The safety of United Nations staff and humanitarian and medical workers must be guaranteed. We call for a thorough investigation into the attack on Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which caused heavy civilian casualties. We oppose the forced displacement and relocation of Gazans and urge Israel to fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law and immediately rescind the emergency evacuation order for northern Gaza.

Fourthly, we must uphold fairness and justice. The root cause of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict lies in the prolonged illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, the long-standing neglect of Palestinians' right to independent statehood and the lack of effective protection of the Palestinian people's basic rights. Fundamentally, the approach needed to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the implementation of a two-State solution and the achievement of peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. Discussions on specific issues should not be taken out of that context, and the actions taken by the Security Council must not deviate from the right direction. If the Council fails in that, there will be no justice in the world, and the Council's decisions may even be counterproductive.

China has been working tirelessly to promote a cessation of hostilities and the restoration of peace. We have maintained close communication with all relevant parties and are committed to playing a responsible and constructive role in achieving a ceasefire, protecting civilians and avoiding an even deadlier humanitarian disaster. China has no self-interest in the Palestinian question. Any initiative that contributes to peace will receive our strong support, and we will pursue any endeavour that facilitates Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation with all our efforts. We will continue to stand on the side of international fairness and justice, international law and the legitimate aspirations of the wider Arab and Islamic world. We stay committed to working with the international community and making unremitting efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just

and lasting solution to the Palestinian question as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): I thank Secretary-General Guterres, Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland and Deputy Special Coordinator Hastings for their briefings. The situation is changing dramatically by the hour, and timely updates for the Security Council are critical.

Japan once again condemns the terror attacks committed by Hamas and other Palestinian militants in the strongest terms. Their hostages must be released immediately. The international community should never tolerate such heinous acts. It is important for us to redouble our diplomatic efforts so that the situation calms down and does not spill over across the region. Israel has the right to defend itself and its people in accordance with international law. At the same time, all parties need to act based on international law.

Equally crucial is addressing the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We must also secure the safety of civilians. We need to take all the measures necessary to allow full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, consistent with international humanitarian law, to alleviate the devastating humanitarian situation, in which basic needs, such as electricity, water, food and sanitation, are running out. Japan would also like to reaffirm the importance of ensuring the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2286 (2016).

The threat of spillover into the region and beyond is very real. We have already seen skirmishes between Israel and Hizbullah, missiles and drones being shot down by the United States Navy in the Red Sea and the bombing of Aleppo and Damascus airports. All too easily, the situation could erupt into a regional war from which no one would benefit. We must act now to prevent it.

Japan supports any diplomatic activities that can lead to de-escalation and the improvement of the humanitarian situation, including the Cairo peace summit over the weekend and ongoing negotiations to free the hostages.

We pay deep respect to the efforts by the United States, Egypt and the Secretary-General that led to the entry of aid trucks through the Rafah crossing into Gaza. But more is needed, and we should encourage further

steps to continue to deliver life-saving assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza without delay. The united action of the Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for international peace and security, is needed now more than ever before. The silence of the Security Council is not acceptable, and we must move forward promptly.

The current conflict has demonstrated yet again the vital importance of the two-State solution. Japan supports the two-State solution, whereby Israel and the future independent Palestinian State live side by side in peace and security. We must not give up on peace. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to live in peace, security and dignity.

In concluding, let me make three points.

First, we need fairness. We need to express sympathy, condolences and solidarity with, and feel the pain of, all innocent civilians, regardless of their nationalities, ethnicity or religious beliefs. The rule of law has to apply equally.

Secondly, we need to be clear about our objectives, which is the two-State solution, through diplomatic efforts.

Thirdly and lastly, we need pragmatism. However ideal a proposal may be, unfortunately, it does not help if it is not implemented. We need to capitalize on proposals that make a difference on the ground. The Council's task is to agree upon the most meaningful practicable steps we can hope for and not to scrap proposals just because they are not ideal. It goes without saying that pragmatism should not compromise international law or international humanitarian law. What we need now is to help innocent lives, not play political games.

**Ms. Opong-Ntiri** (Ghana): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General, António Guterres, for his remarks. I am also grateful to Special Coordinator Mr. Tor Wennesland and to the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Ms. Lynn Hastings, for their in-depth briefings.

The events on the ground are indeed sobering. We take note of the measures being taken to ensure de-escalation of the hostilities and allow for diplomatic and mediation efforts to address the ongoing war, as well as the dire humanitarian situation. We are meeting on a day that is celebrated globally as United Nations Day, 78 years since the founding of the Organization. Ordinarily, it is a day to reflect on the need for the

promotion of global unity and the centrality of the Charter of the United Nations. But the ongoing hostilities and ensuing humanitarian crisis on the Gaza Strip cast a shadow on this auspicious day.

It is also regrettable that the Security Council has not been successful in reaching consensus on a comprehensive humanitarian response since 7 October. While we welcome the opening of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza to allow a convoy of 54 trucks containing much-needed humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, we are aware that much more needs to be done to meet the needs of the more than 2 million people in Gaza.

Following the 7 October attacks launched by Hamas in southern Israel and the abduction of Israeli citizens and nationals of other countries, the Government of Ghana condemned the actions of Hamas and called on the group to cease its attacks and release the hostages without conditions. We are very much concerned about the continuing holding of hostages, four of whom have been released; the reported deaths of 1,400 Israelis and 4,300 Palestinians, mostly civilians, children and the elderly, and the destruction of approximately 40 per cent of housing in Gaza since 7 October. We note that the continued hostilities, which have extended to the West Bank, Syria and Lebanon, portend great danger for the region and for global peace and security.

We are equally concerned about the destruction of public infrastructure and private property, not only in Israel and in Gaza but also in the West Bank, Syria and Lebanon. According to the United Nations, the relentless bombardment has directly hit the facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), such as schools, hospitals, places of worship and shelters, and displaced approximately 1.1 million civilians, including approximately 13,000 UNRWA staff and staff of other humanitarian agencies. We mourn the loss of innocent lives and wish a speedy recovery to all those injured in the war and hope that all displaced people in the affected areas will find a safe place to shelter.

While commending the personal efforts of the Secretary-General, the leaders of Egypt and the United States, their Governments and the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and staff in negotiating the opening of the Rafah border crossing, we appeal to the Government of Israel to allow the delivery of more humanitarian aid and urgently needed supplies,

especially fuel, which is badly needed to power health centres and water treatment plants in Gaza. We are grateful to Egypt, Qatar, the United States of America and relevant countries for the release of the four hostages, and the International Committee of the Red Cross for facilitating the process. We call on Hamas to release all those in their custody without any preconditions.

We also call on all parties to the conflict to recognize their non-negotiable legal obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law, protect the lives of civilians wherever they are and at all times and refrain from attacks on civilian facilities and infrastructure. We believe that the Council has an obligation to continue consultations in order to reach consensus in an expedited manner on a draft resolution that addresses the immediate crisis that is ongoing in the region, including the dire humanitarian situation facing millions.

In concluding, Ghana reaffirms its belief that the path to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East runs through the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the negotiated 1967 borders. We urge all stakeholders, especially political leaders on both sides, to refrain from inflammatory actions and rhetoric, pursue confidence-building measures and strengthen mutual trust in order to address outstanding issues through direct dialogue.

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to thank Brazil's presidency of the Security Council for convening today's important meeting. We praise Brazil's leadership and the way it has been conducting our work, particularly since the eruption of the conflict on 7 October.

On this day, 24 October, United Nations Day, we wish to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General and, through him, to the workers of the United Nations for their dedication to our Organization. The Secretary-General's trip to the Middle East a few days ago bears testimony to his courage and integrity in the face of the difficult crisis that the world has been facing.

We thank the briefers, Mr. Tor Wennesland, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Ms. Lynn Hastings, Deputy Special Coordinator and Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, for their insights and updates on the current situation in the region.

The situation in the Gaza Strip has been a source of grave concern for the international community, particularly since the attacks of 7 October. It is a humanitarian crisis that has been ongoing for years, claiming many innocent civilians' lives. Mozambique associates itself with the collective efforts of the Council aimed at ensuring the protection of civilians and the respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law. There is an urgent need to open up humanitarian access corridors to ensure that those in dire need have access to basic supplies such as water, electricity, food and medicine. In that regard, we reiterate our call on the parties to de-escalate the tension, stop the bloodshed, halt the attacks and stop the human suffering in the occupied territories, including the Gaza Strip, and allow — immediately and unconditionally — access for humanitarian assistance to the desperate citizens in absolute need.

With the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza unfolding before our eyes, we call on the international community to ensure respect for the principles and rules of international human rights, international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions and their protocols. We reiterate the importance of and our collective duty with respect to protecting civilians and civilian

infrastructure always, everywhere and at all times. As Security Council members, it is our duty and responsibility to work together in a united manner and with a unified voice to contain and resolve the conflict, bring to an end the cycle of violence and prevent a regional escalation.

We hold the view that peace is always possible if dialogue between the parties prevails based on justice and observance of the principles of self-determination and mutual recognition. We wish to remind members once again that the Charter of the United Nations compels the parties and indeed the entire international community to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.

We urge the parties to pursue the path of dialogue, working together in a constructive manner for a lasting peace and respecting the principles of the two-State solution in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.15 p.m.*