



Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

9787th meeting

Monday, 18 November 2024, 11 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward/Mr. Lammy/Mr. Kariuki	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Fu Cong
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan	Mr. Fujii
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
	Slovenia	Mr. Štucin
	Switzerland	Mr. Cassis
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0928 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: I would like to warmly welcome the Ministers and the other high-level representatives present in the Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the His Excellency Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Wennesland.

Mr. Wennesland: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this ministerial meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

After more than a year of horrific war and bloodshed, the region is at a grim crossroads. The war between Hamas and Israel has spread to the region, involving non-State armed groups, and now it is engulfing large swathes of Lebanon in a war between Hizbullah and Israel, amid repeated alternating escalation between Israel and Iran. As feared, a year of armed exchanges between Israel and Hizbullah

across the Blue Line has erupted into an all-out war. Daily barrages of rocket fire from Lebanon towards northern and central Israel, massive Israeli air strikes across Lebanon and an Israeli ground operation in southern Lebanon have led to alarmingly high numbers of casualties and massive destruction. Armed groups operating from Yemen, Iraq and Syria have also continued to launch missiles and projectiles towards Israel, while Israel continues to launch strikes on Yemen and Syria. Israel and Iran have also engaged in overt and direct military confrontation, with Iran launching hundreds of drones and ballistic missiles at Israel, and Israel conducting extensive air strikes on Iran.

We are living a nightmare. The trauma and grief that have been unleashed are immeasurable. Hamas's appalling terrorist attacks inside Israel on 7 October 2023 and the killing and continued holding of hostages, under unbearable conditions, by Palestinian armed groups have devastated Israel. The grinding warfare and Israel's devastating military campaign in Gaza have brought about mass destruction and an enormous number of casualties. Most of the Palestinian population in Gaza has been displaced, and whole areas of the Strip are being emptied and made uninhabitable. These events will reverberate for generations and shape the region in ways we cannot yet fully comprehend.

As the Security Council has been told repeatedly, the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as winter begins, is catastrophic, particularly the developments in the north of Gaza, with a large-scale and near-total displacement of the population and the widespread destruction and clearing of land, amid what looks like a disturbing disregard for international humanitarian law. The United Nations and its partners are working around the clock to bring assistance to the population in Gaza, but humanitarian agencies continue to face an incredibly challenging and dangerous operational environment and access restrictions that seriously hinder their vital work. Attacks on humanitarians and the looting of aid, including by organized armed Palestinians, remains a serious and unaddressed obstacle, as was proven as recently as Saturday. The current conditions are among the worst we have seen during the entire war, and they are not set to improve.

Meanwhile, the occupied West Bank remains stuck in a destructive spiral of violence and hopelessness. Israel's military operations in Palestinian cities and refugee camps in Area A continue, often leading to armed exchanges with Palestinian militants, while Palestinian

attacks against Israelis and high levels of settler-related violence also persist. In all of that, civilians continue to pay the price, very often — and increasingly — with their lives. At the same time, settlement expansion continues unabated, as the Israeli Government has taken numerous steps to accelerate settlement advancement, while some ministers are now openly calling for the formal annexation of the West Bank in the coming months and the establishment of settlements inside Gaza. That comes in the wake of significant steps in recent months to reshape Israeli control in the West Bank, including not only settlement enlargement but also large-scale State land declarations and the appointment of civilian deputy in the Civil Administration, thereby deepening the illegal occupation. Those dynamics exact a political toll, further undermining the Palestinian Authority, which continues to face an ongoing fiscal and institutional crisis.

All told, and combined with developments in Gaza and Israel's recent passing of laws against the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, I must issue an urgent warning that the very institutional framework of support to the Palestinian people and a viable Palestinian State are on the brink of dissolution, threatening to plunge the occupied Palestinian territory into even greater chaos.

How much more misery can ordinary people on both sides be expected to endure? What greater burden can be placed on humanitarians to deliver? How much further can we bend the system of international law and institutions meant to protect innocent civilians? How many times can we test the limits of restraint? How deeply can we allow Palestinian institutions to be undermined, threatening the very arrangement meant to ensure a peaceful settlement to this conflict? Frankly, I do not have the answers, but I can say that what we are living now is the result of us having tested all those breaking points for far too long. The steps being taken on the ground in Gaza and the occupied West Bank that I have outlined, not only today but during many briefings to the Council, are taking us further away from the peace process, and ultimately a viable Palestinian State. Armed resistance and military solutions will ultimately fail to provide safety or security for anyone. We must see greater security for Israel and Palestinians and the Palestinians' realization of their right to self-determination. Although preparations for recovery and reconstruction are well under way, humanitarian relief and reconstruction can be nothing more than band-aids without a political solution.

If the parties cannot find a path out of the perpetual warfare, then the international community must define the path forward. The international community must act now, together with the parties, to change the dangerous course we are on. Here is what we need. We need an immediate ceasefire and the release of the hostages in Gaza. We need the ongoing and concerted diplomatic effort to de-escalate tensions around the region, including a ceasefire in Lebanon, anchored in the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). And we need to see the implementation of concrete, irreversible steps towards a political framework that resolves the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ends the occupation and achieves a two-State solution. The international community must put down clear markers on how to end the war in Gaza in a way that lays the groundwork for a viable and sustainable political future.

I have mentioned some of the following principles in my recent briefings to the Council. I choose to reiterate them here today because they need urgent safeguarding and attention.

Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian State, with no reduction in its territory. The repeated displacement of the Gazan population must cease, and people must be allowed to return to their homes. There should be no long-term Israeli military presence in Gaza, while at the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns, particularly in the wake of the acts of terror committed on 7 October 2023, must be addressed. Calls for the re-establishment of Israeli settlements in Gaza must be firmly rejected and clearly opposed. Gaza and the West Bank must be unified politically, economically and administratively. They must be governed by a Palestinian Government that is recognized and supported by the Palestinian people and the international community. There can be no long-term solution in Gaza that is not fundamentally political.

Supporting and sustaining a meaningful political process that can effectively address those issues will require an international community that is engaged and coordinated. There must be a context in which the international community can muster the tools and a timeline for how the conflict should end, rooted in well-recognized principles, with the capacity to leverage the strength, resources and influence of the region and international partners with the two parties. Again, we are in need today of a political framework that will allow for a streamlined collective response to the acute recovery and reconstruction needs in

Gaza, while ensuring that those needs are addressed within the context of a political process that tangibly advances us towards a two-State solution and lasting peace. The United Nations remains fully committed to participating in and cooperate with such an effort and to do its part to ensure that this awful war not only ends soon but concludes in a way that ensures a better future for Palestinians, Israelis and the entire region.

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

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

I thank Mr. Wennesland once again for his frank report.

The situation is devastating and, frankly, beyond comprehension, and it is getting worse, not better. Winter is here. Famine is imminent. And 400 days into this war, it is totally unacceptable that it is harder than ever to get aid into Gaza. In October, a mere 37 humanitarian trucks entered the Strip each day. It is the lowest average in the past year. The situation in northern Gaza is a nightmare of disease, destruction and despair. More than 300 aid workers have now been killed. That is the highest number in United Nations history. Among them are three British nationals, whose families yearn for justice. More children have been killed than in any recent conflict anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, Hamas still cruelly holds onto the hostages, including British national Emily Damari, extending the torment of their families even further. In the West Bank, an environment of impunity exists for extremist settlers, and since 7 October, conflict has spread, engulfing, of course, Lebanon.

We must bring this multi-front conflict to an end. There is no excuse for Hamas's hostage-taking; the hostages need to be set free. There is no excuse for Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid; they need to be lifted. And there is no excuse for violations of international humanitarian law; it needs to be respected by all sides. There is no excuse for malign Iranian activity destabilizing the region; it needs to stop.

The world has failed to bring about the ceasefire that is so desperately needed in Gaza and Lebanon, and it has failed to break the cycles of violence. But the United Kingdom will not give up — not when there is so much, frankly, at stake for civilians in the region, who

are suffering so greatly, but also for us all. On and since 7 October, the nationals of at least 31 United Nations Members have been killed or kidnapped in the region. Merchant shipping, of course, has been disrupted in the Red Sea, and the entire region has been pulled to the brink of an even more devastating war.

Despite this bleak picture, we cannot let experience turn us into pessimists. It is never too late for peace. We need a huge increase in aid. We need to respect aid workers once again and provide proper protection for civilians. The United Kingdom has restarted its funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to help those saving lives and to deliver on the Colonna report. And we have been consistent in our support for international law. We are working hard every day to bring this horrendous war to an end. The longer fighting continues, the deeper the depths of pain and anger that corrode the bonds of common humanity on which a lasting peace must necessarily be built.

When the opening comes, we must be ready to seize it. We need detailed plans for turning an immediate ceasefire into a lasting solution. A strengthened and reformed Palestinian Authority should be at the centre of Gaza's future recovery, security and governance. And we must give the people of the West Bank and Gaza a political horizon — a credible irreversible pathway to a Palestinian State.

In 1947, the United Nations adopted General Assembly resolution 181 (II). Ever since, the Palestinian people have been waiting, for 77 years, for a land that they can call their own; that wait must end. And the Israeli people, who are still threatened by groups dedicated to their destruction, have waited too long for the peace and security promised when their nation was born. We must not give up on our pursuit of a future where all people of the region, including Israelis and Palestinians, can live side by side in peaceful coexistence. Ending the war, securing a lasting peace with a two-State solution at its core — that is what the region needs, that is what the world wants, and that is what we will keep striving to achieve.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now call on the Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

Mr. Cassis (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank Minister David Lammy for convening this briefing.

After more than a year of an appalling conflict, it is high time to decisively alter the current course of violence and dehumanization. In Gaza, the survivors, including countless children, are afflicted by hunger, injuries and disease, while the hospital system has been all but annihilated. In northern Gaza, famine is imminent. Switzerland in particular condemns the hostilities that took place between Saturday evening and Sunday morning when Israel destroyed a residential building in Beit Lahiya, resulting in numerous civilian victims, including many children. We equally condemn Hamas's relentless firing of rockets at Israel.

In response to this dramatic situation, only a trickle of humanitarian aid is being allowed in, as we just heard from the President. Immediate action is required on the part of all actors in the conflict in order to protect the civilian population. All those actors have an obligation to ensure the safe, rapid and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid on the ground. Moreover, the two laws enacted by the Knesset against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on 28 October are problematic because, to a great extent, they are incompatible with international law and because they also imperil the humanitarian assistance provided to the civilian population.

Switzerland calls upon Israel to comply with its obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. That also encompasses the obligation of Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure that the basic needs of the population in the occupied Palestinian territory be met. I also reiterate my call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages.

Switzerland also expresses concern about the escalation of violence in the West Bank and rejects all declarations of intent to annex the territory. In addition, I call for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon and for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) by all parties.

We must, without delay, find a common basis of humanity and build an edifice of peace that is firmly anchored in international law, including the Charter and international humanitarian law. We know what the political solution is — it is the two-State solution, which offers Israelis and Palestinians the prospect of

living in peace and security. I said that to the Council on 29 October (see S/PV.9763). In that connection, I would like to express Switzerland's support for the joint efforts of the 94 States and international organizations that recently met in Riyadh, at the conference of the global alliance for the implementation of the two-State solution. Switzerland will also take part in the next conference on 28 November in Brussels. We need concrete proposals aimed at strengthening and reforming the Palestinian Authority through legal, political and economic measures.

To build lasting peace in the Middle East, it is imperative to invest in young people. I am convinced that the new generations, who aspire to life, not death, are in a position to take the path of reconciliation and to fight against hatred and extremism. It is for this younger generation that we will have to answer for our actions. Let us make sure we do not fail them and turn them into a lost generation.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Foreign Secretary Lammy for his remarks and for bringing us together today. I welcome the ministers participating in this important meeting today, and I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

I will not mince words: the situation in the Middle East requires an urgent diplomatic solution. For more than a year, we have seen devastating civilian suffering in Israel and Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. And we have seen upheaval and unprecedented attacks by Iran and its proxies.

Against that backdrop, the United States has exercised leadership and resolve in pursuing clear objectives: end the war in Gaza by securing the release of hostages while surging aid to Palestinians, who did not start and cannot end this conflict; avoid a broader regional war while forcefully countering Iran's terrorist proxies and destabilizing activities and demonstrating an ironclad, unprecedented commitment to Israel's security; and press for the full implementation of the Council's resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006). Those remain the United States objectives, and we do see a path to achieving them. Secretary Blinken has stated that it is time to end the war, and he is committed to do everything possible to achieve that.

Israel accomplished the goal it set out for itself: to dismantle Hamas's military organization and eliminate its leadership, which was responsible for 7 October.

Now, we need to ensure that the hostages come home and that Hamas does not return to power. Of course, despite public claims to the contrary, Hamas has refused to engage on any of the numerous proposals put forward in the past eight weeks. Indeed, Qatar has expressed its frustration at Hamas's unwillingness to engage seriously. Still, we will not give up on this diplomacy.

As we press for an end to the war, Israel must also urgently take additional steps to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United States has been specific about what exactly Israel must do to improve the situation for Palestinian civilians. We are closely tracking Israel's actions in that regard and engaging with its leaders every single day. And there has been some progress: Israel is currently working to implement 12 of the 15 steps we have outlined.

Still, we need to see all steps fully implemented and sustained. And we need to see concrete improvement in the humanitarian situation on the ground. That includes Israel allowing commercial trucks to move into Gaza, alongside humanitarian assistance. That is crucial to avoiding famine. We also need Israel to address persistent lawlessness, so that the hundreds of trucks of aid arriving at crossing points into Gaza can reach people in need. Most significantly, we need real and extended pauses in fighting and combat in large areas of Gaza so as to enable assistance to reach people in desperate need.

This conflict was stoked and exploited by Iran, which provided support to regional proxies and partners and directly put millions of innocent Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese civilians at risk. The United States has responded forcefully, deploying its military assets on two occasions when Iran launched unprecedented ballistic missile attacks on Israel. And as President Biden has made clear, we will continue to stand alongside Israel and all of our regional partners in defending against Iran's destabilizing regional actions.

At the same time, we recognize that with Nasrallah and other Iranian-backed proxies eliminated, a diplomatic resolution is needed to end the fighting in Lebanon, achieve stability along the Blue Line and return Israeli and Lebanese citizens safely to their homes. Israeli officials last week underscored their openness to a diplomatic resolution that would do just that. We all know that this requires Hizbullah to withdraw from an area between the Blue Line and the Litani River, as well as the full deployment of the

Lebanese Armed Forces throughout the south. For far too long, Hizbullah has threatened the security of Israel, Lebanon and the region. With support from Iran, Hizbullah built up its forces in plain sight and in disregard of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). That cannot and must not reoccur.

Rather than call for unconditional ceasefires that Iran and its proxies have no intention of honouring, members of the Council should speak with one voice in support of diplomatic efforts to achieve a durable end to the fighting. In addition, we expect all parties to respect the safety and security of the personnel and premises of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and take steps to ensure UNIFIL's ability to operate freely and in accordance with its mandate. Peacekeepers must not be targeted.

The United States is steadfast in its commitment to Israel's security. As President Biden has said, United States support for the safety of the Israeli people, the security of Israel, and its right to exist as an independent State are unshakeable. But United States military support alone will not solve Israel's security challenges and protect its people. Nor will proposals to annex the West Bank or construct Israeli settlements in Gaza — which, if implemented, would sow the seeds of further instability and create new obstacles to full integration of Israel into the region. This cannot be a time to waver on our commitment to a two-State solution. Our diplomacy will provide a path forward.

Palestinian dignity and self-determination and Israel's security needs are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. Our goals must be to help Lebanon exercise effective control over its territory and see resolution 1701 (2006) fully implemented and to strengthen regional and international resolve to deny Iran and its enablers the ability to dictate the course of events in the Middle East. Through diplomacy, the region can begin to heal and to rebuild a better future — one without Iran and its proxies, Hamas and Hizbullah, exerting undue influence; one in which Israelis and Palestinians are afforded equal measures of peace and security; and one in which the limitless pain we are seeing today gives way to the limitless understanding that I believe and I know is possible.

Mr. Štucin (Slovenia): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting, and Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

Looking back in history, this past year will stand out as one of monumental shifts for the world as a whole, and in particular for the Middle East. For people in the region, this has been a year of pain and destruction never seen before. Nothing in recent history could be compared to the brutality that we see in Gaza today, the number of civilians killed or the number of women and children killed. Nothing in recent history could be compared to the number of displaced people. As the latest Human Rights Watch report states, 90 per cent of the population of Gaza — 1.9 million Palestinians — has been displaced over the past 13 months. There should be no doubt: humankind has failed again, and the only way to bring back hope is an immediate ceasefire. The Security Council must voice a united demand for a ceasefire and humanitarian access without delay.

For political leaders, this was a year of ever-shifting confrontations and shock waves. One front after another opened, all of which were inherently connected to Gaza, yet increasingly spinning off in their own cycles of violence. The Council should start taking its role under the Charter of the United Nations seriously and provide immediate steps for peace, security and stability in the region, with the United Nations playing a central role.

For the Organization, this has been a year of relentless limitations and attacks. I want to underline Slovenia's unwavering support to the work of the Secretary-General and the entire United Nations system, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. There should always be a united message from Council members in defence of the United Nations system, as it serves humankind on the ground. For the international community as a whole, this has been a year of grave violations of international law. If we want to secure a future for children in Gaza, the Middle East and all around the world, we need to protect and defend international law. We need to protect the independence and impartiality of the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and other courts and tribunals, in order to ensure accountability for grave violations of international law.

In parallel with the overwhelming suffering in Gaza, we are seeing a devastating humanitarian impact in Lebanon and crippling measures and settler violence igniting the West Bank. We fully reject statements calling for the extension of so-called sovereignty into the West Bank. We further underscore the legal clarity provided by the advisory opinion of the International

Court of Justice on the illegality of the Israeli occupation, which must end. There must also be an end to practices aimed against the two-State solution, including those limiting and hindering the Palestinian Authority. Slovenia recognized the State of Palestine, and we see that recognition as a necessary element of the two-State solution. As a member of the global alliance for the implementation of the two-State solution, we are committed to practical measures and a time-bound peace process. In that regard, we support holding an international peace conference as soon as possible.

One thing is clear. Each of us has a responsibility as a member of the Council and a Member of the Organization. The crossing of boundaries that we have been consistently observing over the past year should be matched by bold steps for peace through bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, leading to the two-State solutions.

Mr. Fujii (Japan): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his informative briefing.

More than a year has passed since the reprehensible terror attack by Hamas and others on 7 October 2023, and we do not have words to describe the devastation in Gaza. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians have been killed or injured. Millions are internally displaced. Nearly the entire Strip has been flattened, leaving only a few buildings intact. Little humanitarian supplies have been able to enter northern Gaza for more than a month. United Nations officials have even described the situation as apocalyptic.

Japan's policy has been consistent. All parties must immediately agree to a ceasefire, as well as the release of the hostages, comply with international law and drastically improve the humanitarian situation. We support the tireless mediation efforts by the relevant stakeholders to that end. Our new Administration, led by Prime Minister Ishiba, shares the same principle. Minister for Foreign Affairs Iwaya has been actively engaging and directly talking with Foreign Ministers in the Middle East, including of both Israel and Palestine, to call for an end to the agony in Gaza and beyond. Japan also remains resolute in tackling the humanitarian nightmare where so many desperate Palestinians do not even know when they will receive their next meal. At the same time, the international community must do everything possible to alleviate their suffering.

The exchange of attacks between Iran and Israel is deeply concerning, and a full-fledged war in the region must be avoided at all costs. We strongly condemn

any action that escalates the situation. The hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah have significantly worsened the humanitarian situation in Lebanon and Syria, in addition to uprooting thousands of civilian lives. The personnel of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and related facilities have all also been targeted in Lebanon. We renew our call for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hizbullah and urge all parties to fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006).

In order to respond to the humanitarian crisis in the region, including the catastrophic situation in Gaza, it is imperative to significantly increase the amount of aid and allow greater humanitarian access. In that vein, the protection of humanitarian aid workers is of paramount importance. Hundreds of humanitarian personnel, including more than 240 staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), have lost their lives, some while on duty. That is totally unacceptable.

UNRWA plays an indispensable role in providing humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education and other vital support to Palestine refugees, not only in Gaza and the West Bank but also throughout the region. Japan reiterates its grave concern about the legislation adopted by the Israeli Knesset that would severely restrict the activities of UNRWA. We strongly urge the Government of Israel to ensure a safe and unhindered operating space for UNRWA.

Ensuring neutrality is likewise crucial for UNRWA. We must not tolerate any terrorist attacks by Hamas. We support UNRWA's efforts to implement the recommendations from the Independent Review Group on the Agency.

The situation in the West Bank is rapidly deteriorating, with a rise in settler violence. We reiterate our deep regret about the continuing settlement activities by the Government of Israel, which are in violation of international law.

The only viable solution to the Middle East conflict is the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine. Japan continues to support the realization of the two-State solution. In that regard, we have led several initiatives, such as the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative, which aims to promote regional cooperation by establishing an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and facilitating the transport of goods.

To bring peace and stability to the region, the first step requires building trust among the parties concerned, and Japan will spare no effort in that endeavour.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I acknowledge the presence of various officials in the Chamber. I thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing today and reiterate Ecuador's support for his work and the work of all United Nations staff and its agencies.

The situation in the Middle East has been the Security Council's main concern over the past 13 months. Since the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which my country once again condemns, there has been an explosion of violence, which has had devastating consequences, not just in Gaza but throughout the region.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, the Council has already adopted four resolutions — 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). Their full implementation is mandatory, necessary and urgent. The immediate and adequate supply of humanitarian aid must be the top priority. Preventing a deterioration of the food situation in the Gaza Strip is a matter of urgency. The immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and the implementation of all other provisions set out in the resolutions I mentioned earlier are also urgent.

To ease the plight of the civilian population in Gaza, hostilities must cease immediately. A ceasefire is imperative now. Lives lost cannot be recovered, and that is particularly jarring when children are involved. Enough is enough. The violence must end now. The parties are required to protect civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian aid must arrive unfettered to those in need. Humanitarian actors must be able to work safely and without restrictions. The end of the war will be possible only if there is political will on the part of the parties to the conflict to prioritize peace and work towards a negotiated political solution.

It is our duty to facilitate and support any initiative leading to a peaceful, lasting 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. The 10 elected members of the Council have worked together in recent weeks to promote that goal. We trust that our efforts will be successful.

Turning to Lebanon, the current situation is the direct result of the repeated violation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). To stop the violence, those resolutions must be implemented fully. Ecuador reiterates its support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and those who are part of that peace operation, doing their utmost to fulfil the mandate entrusted to them by the Council. We must ensure their safety, as we, the members of the Security Council, clearly expressed in the press statement (SC/15897) a few days ago — a sign that we are united in rejecting attacks on UNIFIL personnel and premises.

In both Gaza and Lebanon, the protection of civilians must be guaranteed in accordance with international humanitarian law. United Nations staff, including staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and humanitarian workers, must be protected, pursuant to resolution 2730 (2024).

With regard to Yemen, resolution 2722 (2024) must be implemented. The launching of missiles and attacks on vessels in the Red Sea are yet another threat to stability in the region.

The Middle East is facing one of the most difficult times in recent history. The terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023 and the question of Palestine have been exploited by those who want to fuel the spiral of violence. We must keep war and hatred from winning out over dialogue and moderation. Extremism and barbarism must be halted. Our common humanity must prevail.

There is a common denominator in all hotbeds of conflict — respect for the decisions of the Council is necessary in moving towards peace. In the Pact for the Future (General Assembly resolution 79/1), adopted less than two months ago, all Members of the Organization reaffirmed our commitment to acting in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, its purposes and principles, and to meeting our obligations in good faith, effectively honouring this commitment without excuses or pretexts. That is the only way forward.

Mr. Sowa (Sierra Leone): We thank the United Kingdom for organizing this ministerial-level briefing today. We should also like to thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

The crisis in the Middle East is a long-standing issue on the agenda of the Council, but within the past

year we have witnessed a dangerous escalation that has claimed thousands of lives, left more than a 100,000 people injured, destroyed critical civilian infrastructure and forcibly displaced civilians on a scale never before seen in the history of the Middle East conflict. That recent escalation since 7 October 2023 indicates that a definitive solution is required as a matter of extreme urgency. It is therefore very clear that the situation is continuing to have far-reaching and negative implications for regional stability and global peace and security, with spillover effects and engagements across the region, from Lebanon to Syria, from Yemen and Iran.

Sierra Leone, from early on, has been very clear in its condemnation of the heinous attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on Israeli civilians on 7 October 2023. We have also deplored the response of Israel, which amounts to collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The large-scale and indiscriminate killing of civilians, including women and children, the attacks on hospitals and humanitarian convoys and the denial of access to humanitarian aid are all, at a minimum, violations of international humanitarian law and cannot be justified under any circumstance.

There is therefore no gainsaying that bringing the conflicts in the Gaza Strip and other parts of the region to an end should remain an immediate priority for the Council and the international community. On that note, we welcome the theme for today's debate, which is, "Ending the war and securing durable peace". To achieve that, the following the following will be required.

First, the Security Council should act decisively to halt the violence and enforce a ceasefire, not only in Gaza but also in Lebanon. We must urge all parties to recommit to the restoration of the cessation of hostilities as a precursor for laying the groundwork for further diplomatic negotiations that could lead to an agreement for lasting peace. On that note, the current draft resolution on the subject, which was proposed by the 10 elected members of the Security Council and is under discussion, must be given due consideration, as its unanimous adoption may facilitate a cessation of hostilities, the release of hostages by Hamas and access to humanitarian assistance and basic services without constraints. A cessation of hostilities in Gaza may also facilitate a ceasefire across the Blue Line in Lebanon. In addition, a lasting ceasefire in Lebanon will require the full and unconditional implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) by all sides.

Secondly, the protracted conflict must be analysed in the context of Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territories; so the International Court of Justice established in its advisory opinion of 19 July, in which it determined the State of Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory to be unlawful. The international community must therefore, *inter alia*, vigorously and persistently pursue a revitalization of the Oslo Accords — an initiative that was intended to foster a relationship between Israel and Palestine and prepare a pathway for the establishment of a Palestinian State.

Thirdly, in line with the League of Arab States Peace Initiative, as endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit of 2002 and endorsed at Arab League Summits of 2007 and 2017, all Member States, especially those in the region, must accept Israel as a neighbour living in peace and security, in the context of a comprehensive settlement and a normalization of relations, free from violent extremism, provocation and incitement.

Furthermore, in order for the Palestinian Authority to progressively assume its security and governance responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the universal recognition of the State of Palestine and its full admission as a Member of the United Nations are prerequisites. The international community should stand ready to provide the needed financial, administrative and political support that will strengthen the Palestinian Authority to continue with the reforms needed for its stabilization.

In conclusion, it is mainly through political will and commitment that a just, mutually acceptable solution, consistent with international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, that lasting peace can be achieved. We therefore urge both Israel and Palestine to make that commitment for the safety and security of current and future generations.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I also thank Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland for his insightful briefing.

Malta is profoundly troubled by the unabating conflict in the Middle East, which has upended prospects for peace and left civilians enduring unimaginable loss and suffering. An immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and across the region, coupled with unhindered humanitarian aid at scale, is desperately needed. We also reiterate our call for the

immediate and unconditional release of all those being held hostage since the horrific attacks of 7 October 2023. Realizing those immediate-term priorities is paramount if we are to make headway towards a peaceful solution to the conflict. The Council has the responsibility to address the crisis. That is why the 10 elected members of the Security Council penned a draft resolution that seeks to unequivocally address those demands.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as we heard, is apocalyptic. Relentless bombardment has led to harrowing levels of civilian casualties, particularly among women and children. The denial of critical humanitarian aid is exacerbating the tragedy, as north Gaza now grapples with famine. The Council's demands for unhindered and sustained humanitarian access across Gaza, which is in line with international humanitarian law, must be immediately heeded by Israel. We firmly condemn any targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We urge all parties to uphold international law and call for full adherence to the International Court of Justice's orders on provisional measures. Furthermore, there must be no forced displacement of the civilian population in Gaza, and those displaced must be allowed to return to their homes.

The situation in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, is also extremely worrisome. Illegal settlement expansion, abuses against Palestinians and settler violence fuel further instability and entrench the illegal occupation. Critically, those actions threaten the viability of a peaceful two-State solution, and we call on Israel to reverse them. We also recall the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion of 19 July, which clearly stated that Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory must end as soon as possible. Malta also underscores the importance of maintaining the status quo regarding the holy sites and of provocations ceasing, as they also threaten peace prospects.

Moreover, we condemn any attempt to abrogate the 1967 agreement between Israel and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and to obstruct the Agency's capacity to implement its mandate. We call upon Israel to rescind those gravely concerning legislative actions. UNRWA must continue to play its vital, irreplaceable role.

Turning to Lebanon, operations by the Israel Defense Forces and attacks by Hizbullah on Israel are blatant violations of resolution 1701 (2006). We urgently appeal to all sides to recommit to the cessation

of hostilities under resolution 1701 (2006) and to engage to avoid further escalation. Malta also expresses its profound concern about attacks on United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon positions and peacekeepers. As a troop-contributing nation, we strongly reiterate the obligation on all actors to avoid actions that put peacekeepers or civilians in danger.

De-escalatory diplomatic efforts and the re-establishment of a political framework must be the beacons that guide the region out of this grave insecurity. An effective framework must support a unified Palestinian Government that integrates Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinian unity is crucial for lasting peace and for discussions of a sustainable recovery plan for Gaza.

The international community must urgently rally to ensure the fulfilment of Palestinian aspirations for statehood and self-determination, together with assurances for Israel's security.

Malta once again reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the realization of a credible and irreversible 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 all relevant Security Council resolutions and internationally agreed parameters. We must not lose sight of that goal. That is the only path to a just and lasting peace. There is no alternative.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. It reflects the urgency of the situation in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories. It also highlights the pressing need for decisive action by the Security Council. I thank Mr. Tor Wennesland for his briefing.

Our Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Yet the impact of its numerous decisions and resolutions has been undermined by the intransigence, the deafness of the Israeli occupying Power. While the Council has been unable to take decisive measures, tens of thousands of lives have been lost, and hundreds of thousands of people are enduring hunger, illness and forced displacement. To restore its legitimacy and its credibility, the Council must fully shoulder its responsibility and act promptly and decisively to address the escalating crisis in the Middle East.

In that regard, the Council must take the following steps.

First, the top priority is to halt the ongoing tragedy and massacre by imposing an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon. Also, it is vital to effectively address the catastrophic humanitarian situation, as past efforts have fallen short. Humanitarian operations are currently being hindered by the lack of political will on the part of the Israeli occupier, which continues to weaponize starvation, as documented in United Nations reports. We call on all Council members to adopt the draft resolution submitted by the elected members of the Security Council without delay to achieve our common goal of an immediate ceasefire.

Secondly, the Council must uphold the provisions of General Assembly resolution ES-10/24, which outlines a clear road map for ending the occupation and establishing a sovereign Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That shared objective is under existential threat owing to the actions of the Israeli occupying authorities, including annexation plans in the West Bank, settlement expansion and the displacement of Palestinians, in flagrant violation of international law.

Thirdly, the Security Council must safeguard the agreed parameters for resolving the Palestinian question by ensuring Palestine's full membership in the United Nations. Admitting Palestine as a full Member State of the United Nations would reinforce international law and compel the occupying Power to comply with global norms. As President Abdelmadjid Tebboune stated:

"It is imperative to take immediate and urgent action to save the peace process, which is facing an unprecedented deadlock. This can be achieved only by compelling the occupation to adhere to the principles of international law, implementing United Nations resolutions and intensifying efforts to secure Palestine's full membership of the United Nations."

Fourthly, the Council must ensure the enforcement of its resolutions by imposing sanctions on those who violate international law. Despite its explicit stance on the illegality of settlements, resolution 2334 (2016), adopted eight years ago, remains unenforced, allowing settlement activities to persist unchecked.

Fifthly, governance arrangements in Palestinian territories are and remain an internal and exclusive matter for Palestinians to decide. The international

community's role is to support Palestinians and empower the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its responsibilities. United Nations agencies and other institutions must unite efforts to assist the Palestinian Authority in reunifying Gaza and the West Bank and rebuilding the territories and the infrastructure devastated by Israeli aggression.

Sixthly, the root cause of conflicts in the Middle East is well known: the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. The Council must enforce its own resolutions, including resolutions 1701 (2006) and 497 (1981), to end the occupation and restore peace across the region.

The cost of silence and inaction is steep. Today the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples are paying with their lives; tomorrow the consequences will spiral further. The failure of the Security Council and of the international community to implement their own decisions and resolutions perpetuates a system dominated by force, eroding justice and the rule of law. The Security Council bears the heavy responsibility to prevent the collapse of the international legal order. The time for action is now. It is imperative to restore hope for peace and to uphold the principles of justice and international law.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

The Security Council must work for an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. France hopes that the Council will soon be able to speak with one voice on the issue.

We call on Israel to ensure the protection of all civilians and civilian infrastructure, and we recall that any forced displacement of the population constitutes a serious violation of international law. Resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns the use of famine as a weapon of war, the lack of humanitarian access and the deprivation of civilians of goods essential to their survival, is binding on all. The blockades imposed on the delivery of aid to the north of Gaza must be lifted without delay. All the necessary crossing points must be opened, and the necessary aid delivered to the people throughout the Gaza Strip.

France will not cease to condemn the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. We reiterate our unflinching commitment to Israel's security. All the hostages must be released.

The Security Council, on the basis of the agreed parameters, must also work towards a two-State solution. There must be security guarantees for the Israeli people. We must also work towards the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous State for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian Authority has a central role to play in that process, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, which must of course be part of the future Palestinian State. France will continue to work towards those objectives in conjunction with its partners.

Finally, the war in Lebanon must end as soon as possible. The solution is clear: the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), which is the framework recognized by all. It is more relevant than ever and imposes obligations on all parties. We must ensure that resolution 1701 (2006) is respected and implemented by all parties. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon plays a key role in that respect and must be able to do even more, taking into account the realities on the ground, while remaining strictly within its mandate.

Above all, the Lebanese Government must continue to deploy its armed forces south of the Litani River. The International Conference in Support of Lebanon's People and Sovereignty held in Paris on 24 October raised \$200 million for that purpose. It is in that spirit that France is continuing its contacts with the various actors concerned to achieve lasting stability along the Blue Line.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I also thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his sobering briefing.

Peace and freedom are the natural aspirations of all of our peoples, and a Middle East at peace is possible. However, it requires a commitment to peace by all countries in the region and the international community, as well as to achieving that peace through dialogue and diplomacy, premised on the rule of international law. Bombs and bullets cannot guarantee security for any country — on the contrary, they heighten mistrust and potentially breed extremism. In such a climate, peace cannot be advanced.

Furthermore, there can be no piecemeal approach to peace that leaves Palestine behind. The Palestinian question remains central to the Middle East peace process, and there can be no avenue to peace that undermines the inalienable right of Palestine to self-determination. Guyana therefore calls on all countries

of the region and the international community to recommit to the Middle East peace process and to a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question as the foundation for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Against that background, we must all be profoundly concerned by the situation tragically unfolding in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Lebanon. We must also be concerned by the fact that repeated appeals by the international community for recourse to dialogue and peace as the only path to true security for Israelis and Palestinians remain unheeded, while the situation on the ground dangerously escalates.

The Council must take cognizance of the fate of the multiple resolutions it has adopted, prior to and since 7 October 2023, and the current ongoing sequel of atrocities. We must also reckon with the disregard for orders issued by the International Court of Justice in January and March of this year, which are binding under international law.

The lack of compliance with international law and obligations relative to the ongoing atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories and Lebanon is an obstacle to peace in the Middle East, compounded by continuing attacks by armed groups and dangerous regional escalation. The Council must therefore grapple with the need to bring about compliance and de-escalation in the face of persistent Israeli intransigence and continuing armed attacks. Achieving that is the foundation for securing an immediate end to the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon and the immediate release of hostages, laying the groundwork for lasting peace in the region.

The ongoing wars in Gaza and Lebanon have severely aggravated insecurity in the region, and any viable peace process must begin with a permanent and unconditional end to the hostilities. Guyana therefore reiterates its call for an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon.

To ensure that a ceasefire is sustained, there must be a suite of measures to ensure that the atrocities are brought to an end and that peace is advanced in the region. Those measures must include a strong accountability framework so that atrocities are not committed with impunity. The lack of accountability in these wars continues to breed record levels of impunity, with the victims being thousands of innocent civilians who are subject to killing, injury, starvation and other indignities. The measures must also include action by all Member States to ensure that they are not contributing to the perpetuation of the wars.

In relation to the occupied Palestinian territory, and as we look ahead, it would be useful for there to be an international mechanism to ensure that a ceasefire is upheld and guarantee the safety and security of civilians.

In the case of Lebanon, the violations of resolution 1701 (2006) must end, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) must be allowed to fully implement its mandate. Guyana therefore calls for the attacks against UNIFIL peacekeepers to cease and for Hizbullah to fulfil its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) — and Israel as well.

A fully functioning Palestinian Authority is a critical forerunner to a strong and independent Palestinian State. It is therefore important for the international community to support the Palestinian Authority as it governs the occupied territories. Support includes, *inter alia*, ensuring that revenues due to the Palestinian Authority are not withheld by Israel. It also includes safeguarding the critical role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In conclusion, we are at a critical juncture in the Middle East peace process. It has been an extremely costly moment, measured in lives, mainly Palestinian women and children's lives. The scale of need, destruction and disease that has accompanied this dark moment compels us to act not only in the name of humanity but also in the interests of the international rule of law. And our actions must be geared towards permanent and sustainable solutions based on the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Guyana therefore urges the Council to agree to an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza as a critical first step to ending the suffering of Palestinians. We must also act to secure the release of the hostages held in Gaza since 7 October 2023 and to end the hostilities in Lebanon. I reiterate our firm commitment to all constructive efforts to that end.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Since October 2023, the entire world has been appalled by the unprecedented situation in the Middle East. The brutal terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023 amplified Israeli security concerns and set in motion the military response that has resulted in the

near total destruction of the Gaza Strip. Violations of international law, including international humanitarian law, have unfortunately become routine. Civilians, hospitals and schools — none have been protected. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has shared nearly the entire history of the United Nations, is confronting an existential crisis. With insufficient humanitarian aid, demolished hospitals and repeated forced displacements, Gaza's surviving Palestinians are living in hell. Children without educational access are also vulnerable to militant ideologies and groups, sowing the seeds for potential future violence and conflicts. There is simply no time to lose in finding a way out.

Since 1947, when the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), the two-State solution has been at the core of establishing durable peace in the Middle East. Both Palestinians and Jews have lived in that land for generations. Yet the failure to ensure two States on that land has made the region's modern history one of agony, injustice and insecurity. The current armed conflict in Gaza is not only killing innocent civilians but also fundamentally destroying the prospects for a two-State solution. However, it is clear that the massive military operations in Gaza, including the ongoing siege in the north, will not guarantee Israel's long-term security. Rather, prolonging that tragedy will not only deepen Palestinian suffering but may lead to perpetual insecurity for Israel.

The situation in the West Bank is also extremely concerning. Rapidly expanding settlements, widespread Israeli military operations, endless demolitions of Palestinian homes and deadly State-sanctioned settler violence are all undermining the two-State solution. We are also shocked by Israeli Cabinet members' ongoing inflammatory rhetoric calling for the annexation of the West Bank and the resettlement of Gaza. Any attempt to annex the West Bank will permanently harm long-standing global efforts to realize the two-State solution, paving the way for an insecure reality through perpetual occupation. In that connection, Israel must immediately cease all settlement activities as stipulated in resolution 2334 (2016).

The grave situation in Lebanon demonstrates that stability in Israel and Palestine is a precursor to sustainable regional peace. The starting point for fulfilling the vision of a two-State solution must be an urgent end to the fighting in Gaza. Therefore, we reiterate

our call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, as well as in Lebanon. In that regard, we hope that a consensus can urgently be found among Council members on the draft resolution proposed by the 10 elected members of the Council, coordinated by Guyana.

We also stress that UNRWA should remain in the region until the realization of the two-State solution. UNRWA is a core provider of education and health services for millions of Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories and beyond. We hope that Israel will recognize that any cessation of UNRWA's operations will have a negative impact on the security of the region, including in Israel.

Lastly, as resolution 2735 (2024) provides, we believe that Gaza and the West Bank should be unified under the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Republic of Korea is ready to participate in assisting the PA and its reform, both politically and financially.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Coordinator Wennesland for his briefing.

Over the past 13 months, the conflict in Gaza and the situation in the Middle East have continued to take the most prominent place on the Security Council's agenda. We consider the issue frequently, yet the situation continues to worsen. We have adopted resolutions requesting an immediate ceasefire, yet a ceasefire remains elusive today. Instead, the fighting has only intensified. We have unanimously requested the protection of civilians, yet we have seen that international humanitarian law seems to exist in name only, as tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians have been deprived of their lives and subjected to collective punishment. Time and again we have requested the expansion of humanitarian assistance, yet Israel has repeatedly cut off humanitarian supplies and attacked humanitarian aid workers. We have issued countless warnings against the spillover of the conflict, yet we have seen reckless adventurism and the ongoing spread of the flames of war.

We have to painfully admit that, on the Palestinian question, the Security Council has failed to effectively discharge its duties and has failed to respond to the expectations of the international community, which is most disappointing. However, it must be pointed out that the unsatisfactory performance of the Council is not caused by differences among countries but rather by one permanent member, which has opposed the international

community. Had it not been for the repeated use of the veto by the United States or its claim that Security Council resolutions are not binding, the Council would not have been so weak and incompetent. Had it not been for the continued provision of weapons by the United States, the war would not have lasted for so long and would not have caused such massive destruction.

The current situation in the Middle East remains extremely precarious. It is unacceptable for the Security Council to continue to remain at a standstill and do nothing. We call on all members to stand united and to support the Council in taking decisive action.

First, an unconditional and immediate ceasefire must be imposed. A ceasefire is the prerequisite for saving lives and restoring peace. Linking the issue of a ceasefire with other issues — and even setting preconditions for a ceasefire — is essentially giving a green light to prolonging the war and condoning the continued killing. The Security Council must in no ambiguous terms demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza. Israel should also let go of its obsession with the use of force and stop its violations against other countries, including Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

Secondly, humanitarian assistance must be increased exponentially. Gaza is undergoing an unprecedented and human-made humanitarian disaster. There is no denying that fact and its causes are indisputable. Israel, as the occupying Power, must fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law, effectively remove all obstacles to humanitarian access, ensure the orderly distribution of supplies throughout the entirety of Gaza and guarantee the safety of humanitarian agencies and their personnel. We urge Israel to stop suppressing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to stop implementing and revoke the legislation it has adopted against the Agency.

Thirdly, unilateral actions in violation of international law must be stopped. International law and the relevant Security Council resolutions provide the fundamental guidance for settling the Palestinian question. We are gravely concerned about the reports that Israel is seeking to station its military in Gaza in the long term, build a so-called buffer zone and even rebuild settlements. We reiterate that any acts to change the demographics or territory of Gaza are unacceptable. The future governance arrangement for Gaza should be

determined independently by the Palestinian people. The illegal settlements in the West Bank erode the foundation for establishing an independent State of Palestine. Worse still, the dangerous attempts to annex the West Bank would completely bury the prospects for peace in the Middle East. The international community must firmly reject them.

Fourthly, the two-State solution must be reactivated. The two-State solution is the only viable solution for the Palestinian question. Now more than ever, the international community must pledge its support for revitalizing the two-State solution. China welcomes the efforts of Saudi Arabia, the European Union, Norway and others to revitalize the two-State solution. We support the convening of a more broad-based, authoritative and effective international peace conference with a view to formulating the timetable and road map for implementing the two-State solution. We expect progress to be made at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly with regard to the request for convening an international peace conference on implementing the two-State solution.

The 10 elected members of the Security Council have already proposed a draft resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, which represents a fresh round of efforts by the Council to stop the war and restore peace. China supports a prompt vote on and the adoption of the draft resolution by the Council.

I would like to conclude my remarks by pointing out that every moment leaves its record in history. At this time, any delay and obstruction of the Council's actions will ultimately face the judgment of history.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique commends the United Kingdom presidency for convening this important meeting on the situation in the Middle East. We extend our sincere appreciation to Mr. Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We highly value his insights and proposals on the situation on the ground and, more importantly, his tireless efforts in seeking peace and stability in the region in these challenging times.

The conflict in the Middle East has become a central focus for the international community as a whole and has also featured high on the agenda and work of the Security Council. On many occasions, we have adopted, in this Chamber, landmark resolutions on the issue, including resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). Those resolutions

have reiterated the need for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, the release of the hostages and the free flow of humanitarian assistance to the people in Gaza. We have always considered that a ceasefire is vital to paving the way towards a longer-term peace and stability in Gaza and Palestine and in the region at large. It is therefore imperative that we individually and collectively pull together our efforts in order to succeed in that endeavour. We hold the view that peace, security and stability in the Middle East is not just a regional matter; it is a matter that is at the centre of the Council's functions and at the core of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In that context, it is seriously disturbing that each time we meet, we are briefed on the worsening situation and the widening circle of conflict in the region. We are updated, among other things, on the increase in Israel's settlement activities and demolitions of infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territory. Those activities are clearly contrary to international law and undermine our efforts for a durable peace and security in the region. We have repeatedly called for an end to the settlement expansion. It is imperative that Israel cease its policy of land-grabbing and occupation. Illegal settlements are totally contrary to the notion and spirit of a two-State solution. They belong to the ideology of a one-State solution — which is not a solution that the Security Council embraces. Actions that aim to impose a one-State solution contravene the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council, as well as the orders and rulings of the International Court of Justice. As a matter of fact, they inflict severe and unbearable injustice on the Palestinian people and perpetuate the cycle of conflict and dispossession.

We take this opportunity to once again affirm Mozambique's full support for and recognition of the State of Palestine. Palestine is a peace-loving State that has the right to self-determination and is fully entitled to its seat in the family of the United Nations as a sovereign and independent nation. We believe that the latter is a sine qua non condition for bringing to fruition a two-State solution and the establishment of a lasting peace and security in the Middle East. Mozambique embraces the vision of a two-State solution. Israel and Palestine deserve to coexist in peace and security within recognized borders, in line with international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and decisions. In that context, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is crucial and urgent.

A life in dignity is absolutely incompatible with the scale of destruction and the daily massacres and human suffering that the people of Gaza have been going through.

Lastly, we wish to pay tribute to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in favour of the Palestinian people. We appeal to the Government of Israel to rescind its decision regarding the Agency.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Wennesland for his briefing.

The Middle East today is going through perhaps one of the most dramatic phases in its history, with more and more countries and peoples engulfed in a wave of violence. Exactly 400 days have passed since the start of the escalation in Gaza. That number is sad and symbolic because, in all that time, the international community has been unable to take any effective measures to stop the violence owing to the opposition of one State, which considers itself the leader of the Western world.

The British Foreign Secretary is very fond of historical excursions on the topic of colonialism. We urge him to reflect on a basic issue that has a direct impact on what is happening today. True, it would be difficult for him to do so. As members can see, he was absent from the ministerial-level meeting that his own country convened. What are the real origins of the abyss of instability into which the Middle East region is sinking ever deeper? After all, the narratives that we have been hearing in the Security Council in recent months from our Anglo-Saxon colleagues, concerned solely with their domestic political interests, are replete with black-and-white labels, presenting one side as barbarians and the other as an innocent victim of terrorism, which in their view should be forgiven for any atrocities committed in self-defence.

Western delegations always try to start counting down the history of the Middle East conflict from 7 October 2023, as if peace reigned in the region before then. That distorted picture is accurately reproduced in the concept note prepared by the British presidency for today's meeting. It is outrageous that it makes no mention whatsoever of Israel's punitive operation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which has claimed the lives of 43,000 Palestinians, or of the country's ground invasion of Lebanon. Presenting 7 October 2023 as day zero of the conflict provides a very convenient version for the Anglo-Saxon world. Behind that version, as

if behind a screen, it is trying to hide the ugly truth that the origins of the current brutal tragedy lie in the United Kingdom's unprincipled colonial policy towards Mandate Palestine and its crude political engineering regarding the Arabs and the Jews.

Throughout the history of the Middle East, the British Empire has seen the region solely as a springboard for its "Great Game". It unceremoniously interfered in the affairs of the States of the region, drawing inter-ethnic borders with a ruler on a map, sowing discord and pitting neighbours against one another, with no regard for the opinion of the peoples involved, and sought to establish regimes that suited its selfish interests. The division of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire by the United Kingdom and France under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration and the Churchill White Paper were vivid examples of colonial policy, whereby the fate of entire peoples was decided without their direct participation. The same "divide and rule" approach was continued by the West in the Middle East after the Second World War. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, invariably helped the formation of sovereign Arab States and helped them to gain genuine independence and build a future based on their national interests. Unlike the legacy of Western colonialists, the role of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is still viewed gratefully in the Middle East.

The label of the British Empire has changed to the Commonwealth of Nations, but has that changed the imperialist, colonial essence of British foreign policy? Has the United Kingdom repudiated its colonial past, as it claims to have done publicly? In our view, it clearly has not. The United Kingdom continues to provide massive military assistance to Israel and voted against or abstained in the voting on all Security Council draft resolutions that contained direct calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. The United Kingdom delegation refused to support draft resolution S/2024/312, on granting Palestine full membership status (see S/PV.9609). Against that backdrop, London's attempts to present itself as the guardian of peace in the Middle East and of the implementation of a two-State solution look very much like hypocrisy. It is revealing that, in line with its inherent double standards hypocritically lamenting the humanitarian situation in Ukraine or the Sudan, London, like its transatlantic patron, has not yet uttered one word of condemnation of Israel's monstrous attacks on civilian targets in Gaza — targeted strikes on educational and medical institutions that actually

aim to wipe the healthcare system in the enclave off the face of the Earth, condemning many more thousands of Palestinian civilians to a painful death.

From the very beginning of the escalation in Gaza, the United States and the United Kingdom actually issued Israel a license to kill the Palestinian population, providing international political cover, including at the United Nations, for any actions of Western Jerusalem, not only in Gaza but also against Lebanon and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon peacekeepers, who face deliberate threats to their lives from the Israeli military on a daily basis. In any other country context, such steps would immediately be qualified as war crimes. But when it comes to the self-serving geopolitical game of the Anglo-Saxons, they suddenly forget about both international law and moral norms.

Given the track record of our Anglo-Saxon colleagues in the Security Council, who, as they say, are as crooked as a dog's hind leg, we do not believe that they will muster even a glimmer of responsibility or humanism. Over the past few months, they have deployed their full arsenal of political pressure, manipulation and sometimes threats to prevent the Security Council from adopting an unequivocal demand for a ceasefire in Gaza. Against that backdrop, Guyana's courage and integrity deserve special recognition, as does the consistent position of other non-permanent members. Guyana submitted to the Council a strong draft resolution demanding an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire respected by all parties. Of course, that was already too late for the 43,000 Palestinians who had already been killed, but better too late than never. Tomorrow during the voting — and I hope that the voting will be held tomorrow — will be a moment of truth for the Anglo-Saxon tandem in the Security Council. If it again refuses to support a draft resolution under absurd and cynical pretexts, it will mean one thing: despite all their beautiful and polished statements and slogans and false concern for the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians, Washington and London openly support and encourage the continuation of Israel's punitive operation, its illegal occupation, the killing of innocent civilians, starving people to death and the suffering of hostages and illegally detained Palestinians. History will not forget that, just as it has not forgotten all the colonial sins of British imperialism.

Unlike the Western players, who, as they did many centuries ago, are thinking today about their self-serving neocolonial interests, we believe in the

wisdom and maturity of our friends in the Middle East and their ability to determine — independently and without outside interference — their path to building a peaceful and prosperous region with a huge potential and a global historical, civilizational, religious and cultural significance. We fully support the activities of the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic structures that play an important role in upholding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

The onset of a durable peace is possible only by finding a fair solution to the Palestinian issue. Our position remains unchanged. Along with measures to overcome the active phase of the crisis, there is a need to establish conditions for direct dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis on a whole range of final status issues. The outcome of that process should be the achievement of the two-State solution approved by the international community, with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security within the 1967 borders.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I want to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at the ministerial level and to thank all the Ministers in attendance at this crucial juncture. Allow me also to thank Mr. Wennesland for his sobering briefing. Through him, we express our appreciation for all the efforts being undertaken by the United Nations, notably its personnel on the ground, especially those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — the lifeline for millions of refugees and the sole means of survival in Gaza — while under constant attack and the target of a smear campaign and unrelenting incitement by Israel, the occupying Power, with the aim of bringing about the Agency's collapse and denying millions the essentials of life.

For 408 days, 2 million Palestinians have been struggling to survive, chased and hunted from one end of Gaza to the other, displaced and starved. Nowhere is safe, and not one man, woman or child is immune to attack. They are ruthlessly targeted, barely escaping death only to face death yet again the next day. No one can claim that they do not know what is happening in Gaza. No one can claim that civilians are not being killed on purpose, starved on purpose, forcibly displaced on purpose and terrorized on purpose, all part of the undeniable plan to annex the land and

annihilate its people. There is nothing hidden about what Israel is doing in Gaza. It has been exposed by every reliable source there is. The plan that is being implemented and its purpose are beyond doubt. Every announcement of improvement is contradicted by the deepening suffering of the people on the ground, the deepening of the humanitarian catastrophe and the relentless violence, further devastating whatever is left of life in Gaza. The only question that matters now is whether Council members are willing to do what is necessary to stop it.

From Palestine to Lebanon, the same illegal and inhumane methods are on full display, with no regard for civilian life, no regard for the law and no regard for humanity. The mass killing of civilians and the mass destruction continue unabated. Can anyone claim that is not a threat to international peace and security? If that is not a threat to peace, what is? There is only one course of action for the Security Council: to demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, as called for by the Arab and Islamic summit held in Riyadh on 11 November. A ceasefire has long been the demand of the Palestinian people, peoples and Governments around the world and the families of hostages, because they know that that is the only way for families, Palestinian and Israeli, to be reunited in life, not in death. We are on the brink of the total collapse of life in Gaza. Inaction means perpetuating the agony, fuelling the fire and allowing death to prevail. It is to sit by and watch as death sentences are issued and executed every day for hundreds of civilians.

Nothing justifies harming civilians repeatedly, deliberately and massively. Nothing justifies targeting them and indiscriminately killing them. Nothing justifies the wanton destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure. Nothing justifies the use of starvation as a method of war. Nothing justifies depriving an entire people of medical care and aid — and at a time of genocide, no less. If we start accepting any explanation, justification or pretext for those actions, we will be upending the fundamental rules that were elaborated to safeguard humankind, leaving all peoples more vulnerable and more exposed. That is a crisis of the highest order for Palestine and equally so for the international community as a whole. Israel has declared a war on our international law-based order. It is attacking the United Nations, its Secretary-General, UNRWA and the United Nations Interim

Force in Lebanon. It is attacking the International Criminal Court, attacking the International Court of Justice and breaching its authoritative opinion and its provisional orders under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. What world is this, in which war criminals are shielded, judges are threatened, peacekeepers are attacked and humanitarians are killed? What world is this, in which civilians are targeted, killed, maimed, tormented and traumatized, with no protection and no decisive action whatsoever to stop the inhumanity?

Gaza is the crossroads, and what the Council does there will determine where humankind goes from here. Gaza's fate will haunt the world for generations to come. Council members must act now — individually, collectively, within and outside this Chamber — to put out the fire before it devours everything in its path.

Violence is an impasse. What our region needs is not more killing but rather a just political solution. The solution is not for one people to be disappeared but rather for mutual acceptance and existence. It is not to kill and be killed but rather to live and let live. That is the only path towards a shared peace and security. The choice is simple: between occupation and freedom, annexation and independence, apartheid and the dignity of universal rights, oppression and coexistence. It is a choice between war and peace. The current Israeli Government has made a choice. That is obvious from the statements of its representatives and the actions of its leaders, occupation forces and settlers. It is the wrong choice for all. And that is why whatever actions the Council takes or fails to take are so important because what happens next will determine our path for generations to come.

We will do our part, but we cannot do it alone, nor can we do it for long if this continues. We are running out of time. The fate of the region cannot be left to be decided by those blinded by hate and fanatic ideology. It has to be determined by the law, by reason, by regard for all human life, by respect for our rights and our common humanity and by the quest for shared peace and security.

We call on all States to act for the protection of civilians, recognition of the State of Palestine and its admission as a full member in the United Nations. We call on them to act for the implementation of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, to ensure respect for international legal obligations,

without exception, without fear or favour. We call on them to act decisively to end settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, by taking actions against the Israeli officials responsible before we see settlements built yet again in Gaza. We call on all States to support initiatives for just and lasting peace through actions, not only words.

A journalist asked me if it was realistic to expect an end to the occupation when it was clear that the objective was permanent annexation and if it was realistic to speak of a two-State solution when there was clearly no readiness on the Israeli Government side to ever accept an independent Palestinian State. The journalist asked me if it was realistic to speak of coexistence while a genocide was under way. My answer is that the only alternative to an end of the occupation and the realization of the two-State solution and coexistence is ever more deadly perpetual war.

What is unrealistic is to think that oppressing an entire nation will lead to peace and security. What is unrealistic is to continue the same policies that have been tried for decades and yet expect a different outcome. What is unrealistic is to think that one side can simply eliminate the other. We have warned before and warn again of where that path leads us. We have seen it time and time again. We are witnessing it now. We cannot allow for this to continue any longer. A different path is possible if we reject this self-inflicted powerlessness. Being realistic means refusing to surrender to a reality of death and destruction, of occupation and conflict, of hate and war, and instead, working together to chart a path that ends this genocide and occupation and ensures that our collective will for freedom, justice and peace prevails over that reality.

We will work with one and all to chart that irreversible path forward, and the first critical step is an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. We appeal to the Council to act now.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Last week we had the honour and privilege to accompany Ayelet Samerano here in the United Nations and stand by her as she spoke about her son, Jonathan. She has spoken many times about her son, his passion and enthusiasm, his love for the Earth and all its creatures, his smile, his laugh, his love of life. Ayelet said that Jonathan is life and life is Jonathan. That life was stolen by a monster on the

United Nations payroll. As seen on the video, Jonathan was thrown into the back of a truck and taken back to Gaza by an employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The monster who robbed the Samerano family of their son, of his smile, of his embrace, was cashing checks signed and sealed by the United Nations and the UNRWA Commissioner-General.

To say that Ayelet is in agony is a monumental understatement. Yet she has received no apology from the United Nations, no explanation or any expression of regret. The fact that this is not the topic of today's discussion, that a United Nations employee brutally kidnapped an Israeli civilian is beyond me. This information is not a surprise. After all, we have provided hundreds of names and Hamas identifications of UNRWA employees involved in the 7 October massacre. We have exposed many senior UNRWA employees who were Hamas terrorists and many senior Hamas terrorists who were UNRWA employees. How does that not anger the members of the Council, so many of which — although not all — are UNRWA's largest donors. They give their money and resources to the United Nations and UNRWA, rightfully assuming that it would be used for education and social services. Are they not outraged that it has been used to terrorize innocents? Are they not livid at the desecration of the Organization's lofty ideals?

Before looking outward, one must look to their own house, because if one truly wants to lay the groundwork for regional peace, there must first be a change in the Organization's modus operandi in the region — no more incitement of hatred, no more teaching of violence and no more money for terrorism. Commissioner-General Lazzarini himself recently admitted that UNRWA's contributions to current humanitarian efforts could be replaced "without a doubt". I ask for the Council to take him at his word and to help us turn a new page for the betterment of all involved.

Jonathan is still in Gaza, along with 100 other hostages. Israel will never abandon them, never stop fighting for their freedom. The Council can and must help condemn Hamas, demand the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages and turn its focus onto the terrorist organization exploiting Gazan civilians as a tool for the extermination of Israel. While we fight for the freedom of our hostages and continue to combat terrorists across Gaza, we will not falter in our extensive humanitarian efforts.

Just last week I shared our immense efforts since October. In the past six days alone, those relentless efforts continue. For example, last week, over 108 trucks entered Gaza through the Kerem Shalom and Kissufim crossings, as well as the Erez crossing in the north. On that same day, 15 trucks of goods from the United Arab Emirates were delivered to the Ashdod port and entered to northern Gaza. That was their second such shipment. It included over 2,000 pallets of water, medical equipment, shelter supplies and hygiene products.

In addition to delivering aid, we have ensured the maintenance of essential infrastructure: 11 hospitals are currently operating in Gaza, in addition to 14 field hospitals. Meanwhile, we have protected access to water across the Strip. In northern Gaza alone, 113 litres are available per person, per day. I am also happy to report that 50 trucks were collected on the Gaza side by international agencies. However, almost 900 trucks remain uncollected, as the aid wastes away. Our discussions require refocusing across all areas, but our debates on the humanitarian efforts in Gaza are particularly urgent. While Israel facilitates the entrance of hundreds of aid trucks weekly via many crossings, there has been a failure of agencies to collect that aid. While we flood Gaza with aid, there is a drought of distribution. We will continue to fulfil our duties, but the United Nations and international organizations must step up in that regard. Not only must the United Nations step up to its aid distribution obligations, but the focus must also shift to Hamas's constant hijacking of humanitarian aid to fuel its machine of terror and misery.

Let me give the following example. Forty-eight hours ago, together with other organizations — which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will verify — we coordinated the entry of more than 108 trucks via the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza. A total of 97 of those 108 trucks were violently looted by Hamas, with the drivers held at gunpoint. That is an example of the immensely challenging reality that we are facing. We will continue with our efforts, despite the Council continuing to ignore the true cause of the situation: Hamas and its violent greed. Week after week, some at this table villainize and demonize Israel, but their failure to identify the crimes of Hamas against the Gazan people exposes their true agenda, true bias and the blinding hatred that lies behind it.

Israel is under attack on several fronts, including from our northern border, after Hizbullah made the decision to enter the war on 8 October 2023, in

solidarity with their Hamas terrorist comrades. They have launched more than 15,000 rockets, missiles, anti-tank missiles, drones and other such weapons at our civilian population. As a result, 70,000 of our civilians have been made internal refugees. Israel has been perfectly clear on what it takes to restore calm. First, Hizbullah must withdraw to the north of the Litani River, as outlined in resolution 1701 (2006). Southern Lebanon must be freed of Iranian proxies, pursuant to resolution 1559 (2004). No other country represented in this Chamber would accept 70,000 of its civilians being displaced by a terrorist organization. No other country represented in this Chamber would take any different steps than Israel. No other country would lie down and agree to that terrorist organization remaining on its border. The international community must join us in our efforts to restore Lebanese sovereignty to southern Lebanon, thereby freeing the Lebanese people of their Iranian masters and enforcing the resolutions of the Council itself.

There is a string connecting all these crises — a common thread that has spilled blood in every corner of the Middle East. It is the same thread that runs a railway of death through Syria and into Lebanon, supplying and training Hizbullah terrorists to carry out their murderous goals. It is the same thread that armed and bolstered Hamas to commit the 7 October 2023 atrocities, the same thread destabilizing Iraq and Syria, the same thread that directs the Houthis in their attacks against international maritime trade. Iranian officials have themselves acknowledged their relationship with the Houthis. Their sponsorship of terror is not a secret among nations — Iran shouts it from the rooftops.

In a report delivered to the Council last month pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014), it was revealed that Iran's funds and weapons have transformed the Houthis into a military force, evidenced by hundreds of indiscriminate attacks against merchant ships, as well as United Kingdom and United States warships, over the past year. Now that global threat is steaming towards obtaining nuclear capabilities. We cannot — and will not — allow that to happen. Iran dreams of a vision of domination made possible by a nuclear arsenal. Iran's nuclear ambitions pose a threat not only to Israel but to every Member State of the United Nations. We all know that a nuclear-armed Iran would not hesitate to rain down destruction of a kind never witnessed before. Confronting that global existential threat requires a coalition of the courageous. The Council must set the tone, condemn the Ayatollah's regime, impose crippling

sanctions and work with us to draw a line in the sand so that the Middle East may heal from the damage that Iran has caused. This is a moment for decisive action. The Council must rise to fulfilling its purpose and address the true instigator of instability in the Middle East. Iran's black-stained ambitions will end only when we collectively say, "enough".

Before concluding, I must mention the efforts to adopt a draft resolution in the Council that fails to outline the release of the hostages as a condition for a ceasefire. Such a decision would be a betrayal not only of Israel but of the 101 families and their loved ones being tormented by terrorist monsters. That includes Jonathan Samerano and his family, to whom the United Nations owes an unpayable debt. Israel will defend its people. We will never abandon our hostages, never forget them and never stop fighting for them. That is why we started this war, I remind everyone. Make no mistake: history will remember who stood with us to uphold peace and justice and who allowed terror to flourish.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Hachem (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

At the outset, the Arab Group thanks the United Kingdom, which presides over the Security Council this month, for holding this open meeting on the situation in the Middle East. The Group welcomes the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom, Mr. David Lammy, who presides over today's meeting. It also thanks the briefers for their valuable briefings and welcomes the participation of Ministers in this meeting.

Today's debate comes one week after the Joint Arab-Islamic Summit, which was held in Riyadh and presided over by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and one week after the alarm was sounded that famine is imminent in northern Gaza. We meet again today as Israel continues its genocidal war in Gaza, United Nations agencies confirm that Gaza has become uninhabitable, Israel continues its aggression against Lebanon, while violating its territory and sovereignty, and Israel continues to violate the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Arab Group once again calls on the Council to stop Israel's brutal aggression against the Gaza Strip and Lebanon and to put an end to the grave

Israeli violations of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law. The Group warns against the serious escalation in the region, its international and regional repercussion and the expansion of the aggression, which has extended beyond Gaza to embroil Lebanon, while the United Nations and international legitimacy have failed to take decisive measures. The Arab Group stresses the need for the Council to shoulder its responsibility and adopt a binding draft resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and ensure the delivery of immediate and sufficient humanitarian assistance in a safe and unhindered manner throughout the Strip. The Group reiterates its rejection of the forced displacement of Palestinian citizens inside or outside their land and of any attempt to divide the occupied Palestinian territories, especially the Gaza Strip, or to make any geographic or demographic change therein.

The Arab Group condemns the policy of collective punishment adopted by Israel and its use of blockade and starvation as a weapon against civilians in the Gaza Strip. It stresses the need to compel Israel to fully withdraw from the Gaza Strip and open all border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. There is also a need to lift all restrictions and obstacles that impede safe, unconditional and rapid humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip.

The Arab Group condemns the adoption by the Israeli Knesset of racist, illegitimate laws against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It stresses that those decisions and laws are illegitimate, null and void. The Group reiterates its support for UNRWA and calls on all States to provide effective financial and political support to the Agency.

The Arab Group condemns in the strongest terms the horrific Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip, which are part of the genocide and ethnic cleansing, especially in northern Gaza, over the past few weeks. The Group calls upon the Council to establish a credible and independent international commission of inquiry to investigate those crimes and to take serious steps to prevent the destruction of evidence so as to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and do not enjoy impunity. The Group also calls upon the Council and the international community to adopt the necessary resolutions, including by imposing sanctions to stop the illegitimate escalatory Israeli measures in the occupied

West Bank, which could impede the two-State solution and the prospects for a just and comprehensive peace in the region. The Group also condemns acts of terrorism by Israeli settlers against Palestinian citizens and their property. There has been a systematic escalation in such attacks because the Israeli occupation Government supports, arms and protects those settlers. The Group stresses the need to maintain the legal and historic status quo of the holy sites in occupied Jerusalem.

The Arab Group condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Group calls for an immediate ceasefire and the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). The Group also condemns the deliberate targeting of the Lebanese army and its sites, which has left many martyrs and injured among its ranks. The Group condemns the killing of civilians, the systematic destruction of residential areas and the forced displacement of individuals. There are more than 1.2 million internally displaced people in Lebanon.

The Arab Group condemns the targeting of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the repeated attacks in the vicinity of sites in Lebanon that appear on the UNESCO World Heritage List, in particular in Baalbek and Tyre. The Group reiterates the need to protect those cultural and historic sites.

The Arab Group condemns the escalating Israeli aggression in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the targeting of civilians, the destruction of civilian buildings and infrastructure and the violation of its sovereignty, which are serious crimes and violations of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The Group emphasizes the need to end the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

The Arab Group looks forward to the conference on humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip that will be hosted by Egypt in Cairo on 2 December. It reiterates its support for the considerable efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar, in cooperation with the United States, to achieve an immediate and lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and secure the release of hostages and prisoners. The Group holds Israel responsible for the failure of those efforts, as the Israeli Government has backed out of the agreements reached by the negotiators.

In conclusion, the Arab Group calls on the international community to fully implement the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 19 July, which calls for an end to the Israeli occupation

and its implications and for the payment of reparations for damages as soon as possible. The Arab Group also calls on international stakeholders to launch a plan under international auspices, with specific steps and time frames, to end the occupation and realize a sovereign, independent Palestinian State, within the 4 June 1967 borders, with occupied Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the two-State solution, the accepted terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

The Arab Group reiterates that a just and lasting comprehensive peace in the region cannot be achieved without bringing to an end the Israeli occupation of all Arab occupied territories. The Group thanks those countries that have recognized the State of Palestine and calls on other countries to do the same. It underscores the need for the State of Palestine to join the United Nations as a full-fledged Member.

I would like to deliver the following statement in my national capacity.

Israel continues its aggression on Lebanon and its people in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as the relevant international resolutions, primarily resolution 1701 (2006). Israeli forces continue to carry out ground incursions into border villages with the aim of reoccupying and destroying them and creating a desolate, uninhabitable buffer zone. According to the most recent report by the World Bank, nearly 100,000 residential units have been partially or fully damaged. The Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, concluded that what Israel is doing in Lebanon is domicile and that it is not only waging a war in Gaza and now in Lebanon but also mounting a scorched-earth policy to destroy all houses, mosques, schools and places of habitation.

Israel continues to bomb civilian facilities, emergency and healthcare centres and the vicinity of archaeological sites, in particular in Tyre and Baalbek, which appear on the UNESCO World Heritage List, leading to the killing of 3,516 persons and the injuring of 15,000 persons, including women, children, journalists, first responders, medical teams and members of the Lebanese army. The number of internally displaced persons exceeds 1.2 million. Israel continues its attacks on the Lebanese army and UNIFIL. We therefore ask the question: does Israel believe that targeting UNIFIL and the Lebanese army will help to find solutions, achieve stability and return displaced persons?

According to World Bank estimates, the total physical and economic losses in Lebanon now stand at approximately \$8.5 billion. No country can bear that considerable burden, let alone Lebanon, which has been facing countless crises for the past five years. Lebanon has become the only country in the world that has refugees as well as internally displaced persons. We reiterate our call on brotherly and friendly countries to stand alongside Lebanon in its plight. We point to the establishment of a fund that will be replenished by contributions from brotherly and friendly countries. The fund will be under United Nations supervision, so that spending for reconstruction can be under credible international oversight.

The key is for Israel to immediately stop the aggression, establish a ceasefire and withdraw from all occupied Lebanese territory, in addition to ending its violations of the Lebanese sovereignty and its ongoing bombing and air raids, in particular against civilians and civilian areas, and for resolution 1701 (2006) to be fully implemented. We reiterate the need to hold Israel accountable for its countless crimes. We again underscore Lebanon's unwavering and firm commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and to enhancing our defensive capacities so as to preserve our sovereignty and independence in the light of external ambitions and threats. We are committed to reinforcing the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south so that, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006), south of the Litani River will be only under the legitimate authority of the Government of Lebanon, and no weapons will be there without the consent of the Government of Lebanon.

Lebanon reaffirms its support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We rely on its essential and effective role, pursuant to its mandate, in cooperating and coordinating with the Lebanese Armed Forces in order to strengthen the State authority throughout the Lebanese territories within the internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, we recall the words of His Excellency Mr. Abdallah Bouhabib, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon, before the Council of Arab and Muslim Foreign Ministers. He said that partial solutions through a ceasefire and a recommitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) are much preferable to a continuation of the war. However, the most effective solution to establishing lasting peace in southern Lebanon is a comprehensive one, meaning

that the more Israel continues to violate Lebanon's sovereignty by land, sea and air and the more Israel avoids acknowledging the international borders that were recognized and demarcated between Lebanon and Palestine in 1923 and confirmed by the Lebanese-Israeli Armistice Agreement signed on the island of Rhodes in 1949 under the auspices and oversight of the United Nations, the more Israel contributes for future wars, which we are working tirelessly to avoid. Whoever wants to live in peace with their surroundings, including Lebanon — which embraced peace as a strategic choice at the Beirut Arab Summit in 2002 and adopted the

Arab Peace Initiative proposed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — must end the violations once and for all and end the occupation of Lebanese lands.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on the list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of members with the Council, to suspend the meeting until 4.30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

I am grateful in particular to the interpreters for enabling us to go significantly beyond our time today.

The meeting was suspended at 1.40 p.m.