



# Security Council

Eightieth year

**9830**<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Friday, 3 January 2025, 10 a.m.  
New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bendjama . . . . .	(Algeria)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
	Denmark . . . . .	Ms. Lassen
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Greece . . . . .	Mr. Sekeris
	Guyana . . . . .	Ms. Persaud
	Pakistan . . . . .	Mr. Ahmad
	Panama . . . . .	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Kanu
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
	Somalia . . . . .	Mr. Osman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Shea

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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\*Reissued for technical reasons on 10 March 2025.

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

### **Expression of welcome to the new members of the Security Council and of thanks to the outgoing members**

**The President:** As this is the first formal meeting of the Security Council this year, I should like to extend my warm wishes for the New Year to all members of the Security Council, the United Nations and the Secretariat.

In presiding over this first formal meeting of the Council in 2025, I am happy to welcome the new members: Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. We look forward to their participation in the work of the Council. Their experience and wisdom will be of invaluable assistance in the discharge of the Council's responsibilities.

I shall also take this opportunity to express the Council's gratitude to the outgoing members, namely, Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland, for their important contributions to the work of the Council during their terms.

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President:** I should also take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Mrs. Linda Thomas-Greenfield and her team, representing the United States, for their service as President of the Council for the month of December. I am sure I speak on behalf of all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and her team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt and Israel 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 the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Dr. Rik Peepkorn, World Health Organization Representative for the West Bank and Gaza, and Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan, medical practitioner with the Medical Aid for Palestinians charity.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Türk.

**Mr. Türk:** A human rights catastrophe continues to unfold in Gaza before the eyes of the world. Israel's means and methods of warfare have killed tens of thousands of people, inflicted vast displacement and laid waste to the territory. That has raised the utmost concerns about compliance with international law.

A recent report by my Office, covering the period between 7 October 2023 and 30 June 2024, documents patterns of attacks on hospitals, which start with Israeli air strikes and are followed by raids by ground troops, the detention of some patients

and staff, the forced removal of others and the withdrawal of troops, leaving the hospitals essentially non-functional. The report also details the killings of patients, staff and other civilians. Hamas and other armed groups continue to launch sporadic and indiscriminate attacks on Israel and, reportedly, to expose civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, to attack by operating among them, which is totally unacceptable.

The protection of hospitals during warfare is paramount and must be respected by all sides, at all times. The destruction of hospitals across Gaza goes beyond depriving Palestinians of their right to access adequate healthcare. Those hospitals provided sanctuary for thousands of people with nowhere else to go. The destruction wrought by the Israeli military's attacks last Friday on Kamal Adwan Hospital — the last functioning hospital in north Gaza — reflects the patterns of attacks documented in the report. Some staff and patients were forced from the hospital, while others, including the General Director, were detained, with many reports of torture and ill-treatment. The Israeli military announced the next day that its months-long operation in north Gaza was concluded with the separation of north Gaza from Gaza City. We are now seeing reports that parts of North Gaza have been almost completely emptied of Palestinians. We have repeatedly warned that Israel's military operations in north Gaza place the entire Palestinian population of the governorate at risk through death and displacement.

For months, we have reported intense bombardment on residential buildings, shelters and medical facilities, displacement orders, the prevention of the entry of aid and attacks on Palestinians trying to flee and on their shelters once they reached central Gaza. Across Gaza, Israeli military operations in and around hospitals and the associated combat have had a terrible impact precisely at a time of massive demands on healthcare due to the ongoing conflict. They have been particularly devastating for certain Palestinian civilians. Six babies have reportedly died of hypothermia in the past few days alone. Women, especially those who are pregnant, have suffered gravely. Many women have given birth with little or no support, entailing increased risks to both mother and child. My Office has been told that newborns have died as a direct result of that lack of care. According to the Ministry of Health of the State of Palestine, more than 100,000 Palestinians have been injured in Gaza. Many of those wounded people have died while awaiting treatment because of a lack of access to healthcare. All that is occurring against the backdrop of increased obstacles to the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies bringing aid, including urgent medical supplies, into Gaza and distributing it across the territory.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, more than 1,050 medical professionals have been killed in Gaza. It is important to note that medical personnel are civilians who serve a critical function, particularly in wartime. They enjoy special protection under international law. A recent report by my Office documents at least 136 strikes on at least 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities in Gaza, which caused significant death and injury among doctors, nurses, medical staff and other civilians and damaged or destroyed many of the buildings targeted.

In the exceptional circumstances in which medical personnel, ambulances and hospitals lose their special protection and are considered military objectives, attacks on them must still comply with the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack. Military operations must always distinguish between military targets and civilians. The use of heavy weapons against hospitals is difficult to reconcile with that principle. Failure to respect those principles is a breach of international humanitarian law. Intentionally directing attacks against hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are treated, provided that they are not military objectives, is a war crime. Under certain circumstances, the deliberate destruction of healthcare facilities may amount to a form of collective punishment,

which would also constitute a war crime. If committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on the civilian population, such acts may also amount to crimes against humanity.

In most instances, Israel alleges that the hospitals were being improperly used for military purposes by Palestinian armed groups. I have, in fact, just received a letter from the Israeli Ambassador, asserting that Kamal Adwan Hospital was militarized by Hamas and that Israeli forces took extraordinary measures to protect civilian life while acting on credible intelligence. Yet Israel has not provided sufficient information to substantiate many of those claims, which are often vague and broad. In some cases, they appear to be contradicted by publicly available information. If verified, the allegations would raise serious concerns that Palestinian armed groups were using the presence of civilians intentionally to shield themselves from attack, which would also amount to a war crime. That is why I am calling for independent, thorough and transparent investigations into all Israeli attacks on hospitals, healthcare infrastructure and medical personnel, as well as into the alleged misuse of such facilities.

I once more warn in the strongest terms about the risk of atrocity crimes being committed in the occupied Palestinian territory. I urge all those with influence to take action accordingly and to protect civilians as a matter of absolute priority. It is essential that there be full accountability for all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

It is imperative that all parties do everything in their power to stop the fighting in Gaza so that a long-term ceasefire can take hold. All hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. It is imperative that all those arbitrarily detained be released at once.

I call on Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure and facilitate access to life-saving humanitarian aid, including adequate healthcare, for the Palestinian population. I urge Israel to end its continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as rapidly as possible, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* (see A/78/968) and wider international law.

I call for future recovery and reconstruction efforts to prioritize the restoration of the healthcare system in Gaza.

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

I now give the floor to Dr. Peepkorn.

**Dr. Peepkorn:** My name is Dr. Rik Peepkorn, and I am the World Health Organization (WHO) representative for the occupied Palestinian territory. I visit Gaza very regularly — every two to two and a half months, I stay for between two and four weeks — and I have participated in multiple WHO-led missions to all hospitals all over Gaza, some of which we will focus on today.

First of all, I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief Council members on the health situation in Gaza. The year 2025 is beginning on a sombre and deeply worrisome note, as fighting continues to intensify and hope dwindles for Gazans, who have been enduring this nightmare for 14 months. Approximately 7 per cent of the population has been killed or injured since October 2023, with more than 25 per cent of the more than 105,000 injured people suffering from life-changing injuries that will need extensive rehabilitation and lifelong assistive medical technologies, according to the estimates of WHO and its partners. Time and again, hospitals have become battle grounds, leaving them out of service and depriving those in need of life-saving care. The health sector is being systematically

dismantled and pushed to breaking point, its resilience tested amid dire shortages of medical supplies, equipment and specialized staff. Only 16 of the 36 hospitals in Gaza remain partially functional, with a total bed capacity of just 1,822 — far below what is needed to address the overwhelming health crisis. Owing to damage, attacks and shortages, most hospitals can provide only basic care and lack the capacity for the specialized treatment of chronic diseases and complex injuries, leading to increased suffering and death.

Despite those challenges, the pace of medical evacuations remains extremely slow. Since October 2023, only 5,383 patients have been evacuated abroad for medical treatment with support from WHO and its partners. Of those, only 436 have been evacuated since the closure of the Rafah crossing on 6 May 2024, which was facilitated by WHO. More than 12,000 people still require medical evacuation. At the current rate, it would take 5 to 10 years to evacuate all those critically ill patients, including thousands of children.

Despite the challenging environment, WHO and its partners are doing all they can to keep hospitals and health services operational. However, our ability to move aid is severely compromised. The entry of supplies into and across Gaza remains extremely slow owing to restrictions, delays in the clearance of supplies entering the Strip and obstacles to our missions within Gaza. In 2024, only 111 out of 279 — that is only 40 per cent — WHO missions were facilitated, directly affecting our ability to safely and promptly resupply hospitals, transfer critical patients and deploy medical emergency teams. Since October 2023, almost every week, WHO has repeatedly issued urgent calls for the protection of health workers and hospitals as per international humanitarian law, yet those calls remain unheard. Attacks on hospitals persist. So far, WHO has verified 654 attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza, resulting in 886 fatalities and 1,349 injuries.

In north Gaza, which has been under siege for approximately 90 days, the health and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Only Al-Awda Hospital remains minimally functional, and there are no primary healthcare facilities available in the area. The lack of healthcare poses a severe threat to the lives of the thousands of Palestinians still in the area. Kamal Adwan Hospital, the main hospital in north Gaza, was put out of service following a raid last week and relentless attacks since October 2024. WHO was consistently hindered in accessing the hospital during that period, with only 10 out of 21 missions partially facilitated. On 27 December 2024, the hospital was emptied, and a majority of patients were forced to a nearby location, while critical patients were transferred to the non-functional Indonesian hospital, which lacks the necessary equipment and supplies to provide adequate care. WHO remains deeply concerned about Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the Director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, who was detained during the raid. We have lost contact with him since and call for his immediate release.

Reports indicate that key areas of the hospital were burned and severely damaged during the raid, including the laboratory, surgical unit, engineering and maintenance department, operations theatre and the medical store. The efforts of WHO and its partners over the past few months to sustain the hospital's operations have been undone. We call for urgent access to the hospital to assess the damage and determine if it can be restored. We also call for facilitation to transfer the medical equipment from Kamal Adwan to Al-Awda and other hospitals in Gaza City.

At the Indonesian hospital, the situation continues to deteriorate. Although the hospital is out of service, seven patients, nine caregivers and six health workers remain there. Today the hospital reportedly received an order to evacuate and to provide a list of names and details of all those still inside. We call for the hospital

and its remaining patients, who are in a dangerous and active conflict zone, to be protected. The hospital is already severely damaged, and further attacks will make it even harder to restore the facility.

Al-Awda, which is the last remaining minimally functional hospital in north Gaza, is struggling to stay open. Hostilities continue around the hospital, resulting in an influx of injuries. Thirty-seven inpatients remain inside. Food, water and fuel are depleting fast. The hospital has been without many essential medicines for more than 85 days. Access to the hospital is dangerous for patients in need owing to the nearby hostilities. Unfortunately, we have just received reports that Al-Awda has also been ordered to fully evacuate. With that, the last health lifeline in north Gaza is at risk of being severed. WHO is planning a mission to Al-Awda, Kamal Adwan and the Indonesian hospital for assessment. However, currently, no roads to Kamal Adwan or Al-Awda are accessible. We call for access to be facilitated urgently and for the evacuation orders to be rescinded.

As I conclude, I want to emphasize that despite the incomprehensible challenges, the health system of Gaza has not collapsed. It is deeply affected and bruised, but against all odds, health workers, WHO and its partners have kept services going as much as possible. Al-Shifa and Nasser medical complexes, which have been restored after being left in ruins, including the European Hospital, following severe attacks, raids and destruction in early 2024, are prime examples of the resilience of Gaza's health system and the inspiring dedication of its health workers, with the support of WHO and its partners. That is nothing short of a feat and is a reason to be hopeful. It shows what can be achieved if healthcare is protected and peace is given a chance.

I want to recall that hospitals have special protection under international humanitarian law because of their life-saving function. While hospitals may, under specific and limited circumstances, lose their protected status, that does not then absolve any party from its obligations to comply with all other relevant rules of international humanitarian law, which are applicable when launching attacks on military objectives, including the principles of distinction, precautions in attack and proportionality. Those remain fully applicable.

Lastly, I once again I repeat WHO's call: to ensure urgently that hospitals in north Gaza can be supported to become functional again; for expedited medical evacuations and the use of all corridors from Gaza to get patients out, including to the West Bank and East Jerusalem; for sustained access to hospitals; for an increased flow of aid into and across Gaza; and for an urgent and lasting ceasefire.

**The President:** I thank Dr. Peeperkorn for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Dr. Haj-Hassan.

**Dr. Haj-Hassan:** While I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to the Council today, I recognize that what has been shared before me and has been said over and over again in this very Chamber by so many other advocates, humanitarians and authorities who have come before the Council in the past 454 days is already so damning and both morally and legally sufficient to merit a response.

In the words of my friends and female Gazan surgeon, Dr. Sara Al-Saqqa, who I spoke to this morning,

"I do not know what one can say or write honestly. Last time I was asked this question, I felt like screaming in the face of the whole world and asking them — what are you waiting for?"

The Council has seen and heard it all. In the next few minutes I have with the Council today, I will not attempt to describe the systematic and intentional attacks on healthcare in Gaza because that would take far more time than the amount of time

I have and has also been summarized by those who spoke before me and extensively documented by bodies of the United Nations itself. Instead, I would like to share with the Council the perspectives of healthcare workers in Gaza who have been sending SOS messages to the Council for over a year and who, if still alive today, are at the front lines, setting an example for all of us of what it means to practise what one preaches.

I have had the privilege of teaching in Gaza's medical schools and hospitals and getting to know these healthcare workers over many years. Despite being under siege, they were able, astoundingly, to build an extensive healthcare system and provide high-quality medical care to patients and excellent medical education for the growing generation of doctors. They are proud, hard-working professionals who take their oath to care for their patients very seriously. When asked why he had not left the hospitals when they were besieged, Dr. Hammam Alloh responded,

“Who would care for my patients? Do you think I went to medical school and for my postgraduate degrees for a total of 14 years to think about my life and not my patients?”

Dr. Alloh was killed by an Israeli air strike on 12 November 2023, at the age of 36 years.

Since October 2024, healthcare workers have become a clear target of Israel's military violence. Our colleagues and friends have been killed, maimed, unlawfully detained and tortured. More than 1,000 healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza in the past 15 months. Hundreds of healthcare workers have been held in Israeli captivity; at least four have been killed while in detention. They tell us that they are targets because they are healthcare workers, that wearing scrubs and white coats is like wearing a target on their backs. I asked — and Council members may be asking — why? It is because hospitals and healthcare workers represent life and a will to keep people alive. In May 2024, after Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh, the head of orthopaedics at Al-Shifa Hospital was killed in Israeli detention after months of torture, a surgeon who knew him well sent us this message: “practicing medicine has become a crime, and the penalty for saving people's lives has become detention and being tortured to death”.

I messaged colleagues in Gaza last night to ask what they would like me to say to the Chamber today. Here are some of their messages:

“The savagery continues to get worse. The crimes are beyond brutal and the world continues to watch. No one is stopping Israel. They do whatever they want without any consequences. There is no such thing as international law or the law applies only to certain parts of the world and not to us — double standards, as they say. After 15 months of brutality, it is now clear that our blood is cheap, and we are just numbers to the world.”

Dr. Khamis Elessi, a Palestinian pain and rehabilitation doctor in Gaza and a dear friend and fellow Oxford graduate, wrote to me this morning, saying,

“Yesterday I was working in the emergency department when I was shocked to find my nephews were brought in. One was martyred and the other was severely injured. We are devastated. This is my message: stop the war. Enough is enough.”

My colleague, Dr. Sara Al-Saqqa, who I quoted earlier today and who, incidentally, works for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Gaza, said,

“I never thought that international law or human rights institutions would allow this: for 2 million people to be locked in a cage and systematically massacred. Imagine being sick or injured and knowing that the cure is available, but not being able to access it because the crossings are closed. There is no greater injustice.”

The final set of messages I want to share come from Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, Medical Director of Kamal Adwan Hospital and a paediatrician like me, whom my colleague from the World Health Organization just spoke about. On 3 November, he wrote,

“We urgently need increased pressure on the international community to help the healthcare system perform its duties in accordance with established humanitarian laws. We are not asking for anything beyond this. We are here to provide a humanitarian service to our people, the injured and those in need of assistance. And we wish to continue doing our job.”

On 3 December, after repeated SOS calls in between, he then said,

“Today, for the fifth time, Kamal Adwan Hospital has been targeted in a horrifying, relentless matter. Drones are dropping bombs filled with shrapnel that injure anyone who dares to move. Once again, the occupation is focusing its aggression on medical teams. We are exhausted by the ongoing violence. Why are we subjected to such brutality? Each day the hospital is systematically targeted.”

And what happened next after that? After the Israeli military raided the hospital, people were blindfolded and undressed. Patients on crutches were put on the ground as Israeli soldiers took celebratory pictures with the surviving healthcare workers in humiliating positions. The hospital was burned down and Dr. Abu Safiya was taken, we believe, along with many colleagues.

I speak to the Council today, like so many healthcare workers and citizens around the world, filled with grief, anger, frustration and — frankly — disbelief. I am filled with disbelief that all of our repeated first-hand and utterly damning testimonies have still not moved the world to meaningful action, disbelief that, despite the countless addresses to the media and even here in the United Nations just five weeks ago (see S/PV.9794), we are still here trying to convince anyone who will listen that this needs to stop. I am in disbelief that all previous propositions to end violence have been obstructed by the very organ whose primary responsibility is supposedly to maintain international peace and security, disbelief that, on 20 November, the United States and my country of citizenship again vetoed a Security Council draft resolution that demanded an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza (see S/PV.9790), despite 14 votes in favour. I am in disbelief that this month will mark an entire year since the International Court of Justice issued provisional measures after ruling that Israel’s acts could amount to possible genocide and since Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among other organizations, concluded that Israel’s actions are consistent with genocide. I am in disbelief that we are still here after we have driven 96 per cent of Gaza’s children to believe their death is imminent, while many wish for their own death, and after seven infants, as of yesterday, have died from hypothermia in the past week alone — meaning that they literally froze to death. I am in disbelief that we are still here when Israel’s military violence has created the largest cohort of paediatric amputees in known history, as well as the largest cohort of journalists and United Nations workers killed. I shudder to even estimate the number of children who have lost their parents and have been orphaned for life. I am in disbelief that Israel has killed another 90 Palestinians in Gaza, at least, in the short time since I got the call last night requesting that I address the Council here today.

We are pleading with the world and with the people and States that make up this very body to show us that international humanitarian law matters and that human rights are universally applied, and to stay true to the very reason that this body was created.

**The President:** I thank Dr. Haj-Hassan for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Algeria.



We thank Mr. Volker Türk and Dr. Peeperkorn for their valuable briefings, and we also extend our deep gratitude to Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan for her sobering briefing, which serves as a powerful testimony from a witness who was present in Gaza and observed first-hand the senseless destruction of health infrastructure and the unprecedented atrocities inflicted upon the Palestinian people.

The ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, has a clear and alarming objective: pushing the Palestinian population out of their lands through an obvious and deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing. One of the key pillars of that policy is the systematic destruction and demolition of the healthcare system. The report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 31 December 2024, on the eve of the New Year, revealed devastating findings: 136 strikes targeted at least 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities, resulting in significant casualties and destruction. Figures speak volumes. Fifty-three per cent of hospitals in Gaza are no longer operational. Out of 138 primary health centres, only six remain fully functional. One hundred thirty ambulances have been damaged. More than 14,000 patients require urgent medical evacuation abroad, more than 1,000 healthcare workers have been killed, and hundreds of healthcare workers have been detained by the Israeli authorities. Non-governmental organizations reported on cases of torture and ill-treatment. According to the United Nations, several physicians have died in Israeli custody. Those are but a few examples that starkly illustrate the systematic dismantling of Gaza's health infrastructure, targeting essential services and medical personnel through actions that amount to genocidal tactics.

One week ago, on 27 December, following more than three months of siege and repeated attacks near and around the area, the Israeli occupying forces finally invaded Kamal Adwan Hospital, the main facility in the north of Gaza. That hospital came under assault by snipers, tanks and quadcopter drones, terrorizing patients and medical staff. Those actions included torture, executions, the destruction of vital medical equipment and the deliberate setting of fires that engulfed entire wards of the hospital. The Israeli occupying forces have actively sought to shut down Kamal Adwan Hospital, rendering it completely out of service. That raises legitimate and critical questions about the real motives behind its demolition. However, what is indisputable is that the act was not driven by military necessity, but rather by a deliberate effort to deprive northern Gaza of essential health services, thereby forcing the displacement of its population. The deliberate destruction of healthcare facilities constitutes a form of collective punishment that is classified as a war crime under international law.

International humanitarian law is clear regarding the protection of hospitals. Article 11 of Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 stipulates that: "Medical units and transports shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack." The Council's own resolution 2286 (2016)

"demands that all parties to armed conflicts fully comply with their obligations under international law [...] to ensure the respect and protection of all medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities". (*resolution 2286 (2016), para. 2*)

In order to justify those heinous acts, the Israeli occupying authorities have resorted to unfounded allegations, claiming that hospitals were being used for military purposes by Palestinian armed groups. In the same Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report it is, however, stated clearly, and I repeat what has been said by Mr. Türk, that "insufficient information has so far been made available to substantiate these allegations, which have remained vague and broad and, in some cases appear contradicted by publicly available information". Yet to

argue on the basis of international law, in particular international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions, feels increasingly futile. What we are witnessing in Gaza is complete disregard for the rule of law. And Israel, the Power occupying the Palestinian territories, acts as though international law does not exist or simply does not apply to it. Those barbaric actions are fuelled by a sense of impunity and a sense of immunity. We must end that impunity and that immunity.

As Mr. Türk aptly stated, it is essential that there be independent, thorough and transparent investigations into all those incidents and full accountability for all the violations of international humanitarian and human rights law that have taken place in Gaza. Crimes are being committed in full view of the world, broadcast live and meticulously documented. In an era in which no act escapes the lens of global scrutiny, today ignorance is not a defence. Today silence is complicity. The evidence is undeniable. The suffering of the Palestinians is irrefutable. It is incumbent upon us all, as human beings, to take a clear and principled stand. No one can claim ignorance of the blatant violations of international law that continue to unfold before our eyes.

We cannot afford another year of misery and another year of massacres. Israel's actions are an attempt to extinguish hope in the hearts and minds of the Palestinian people and to deny them the means of surviving on their own land. By destroying hospitals — beacons of hope, places of healing and symbols of humanity — the Israeli occupying Power aims to erode the resilience of the Palestinian people. We must act together to put an end to the tragedy. To delay action is to condone injustice. To remain passive is to abandon our humanity. It is time for the Council to demand an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Ms. Shea** (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, I congratulate Algeria on its presidency and extend a warm welcome, as you, Mr. President, did to the new members who have joined us today: Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia.

I thank High Commissioner Türk, Representative Peeperkorn and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their powerful briefings.

Throughout the conflict, Hamas has repeatedly misused civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, to store caches of weapons, house fighters and coordinate attacks against Israel. Hamas continues, day in and day out, to put civilians in harm's way through their tactics and their use of those facilities. I urge colleagues in the Chamber to criticize Hamas for those actions and to call them out for continuing to put Palestinian civilians in Gaza in the crosshairs. Far too many still cannot bring themselves to do so. Israel's fight is with Hamas and not the Palestinian civilians, whom the terrorist group falsely purports to represent. According to the Israel Defense Forces, more than 240 fighters were apprehended at Kamal Adwan Hospital, including 15 individuals who had participated in the massacre of 7 October 2023.

Even as it battles Hamas, Israel has a moral imperative to prevent civilian harm. We do not want to see hospitals as scenes of violence. No one benefits from that, least of all the civilians, who neither started the conflict, nor have the means to end it and who desperately need medical attention. Civilians cannot be left without functioning hospitals or adequate medical care. It is vital for Israel to comply with international humanitarian law and to take every possible step to prevent harm to civilians, in particular when it comes to patients receiving care at Kamal Adwan Hospital and medical professionals dedicated to treating the population. With regard

to reports about the Director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, we in the United States Government are in contact with the Israeli Government and partners on the ground and are gathering information.

Far too many civilians in Gaza are hungry and without medication, clean drinking water or adequate housing. Secretary Blinken has repeatedly emphasized that we need to end the conflict, bring the hostages home, including the seven Americans held by Hamas, and chart a path forward in the post-conflict period so as to provide for governance, security and reconstruction in Gaza. We must also immediately ensure a surge in humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians throughout Gaza or many will not survive the rest of the winter. We have made clear to Israel that it must do more to address those preventable humanitarian shortfalls. We have been explicit about the specific steps that we must see Israel take, including surging the entry of food, medicine and other essential supplies into Gaza, knowing that winter is here. There must be no forcible displacement or policy of starvation in Gaza, which would have grave implications under both United States and international law. We must see a surge in humanitarian aid delivered immediately. Only a sustained flow of assistance, food, clean water and medical supplies into Gaza will bring relief and address the catastrophic levels of food insecurity.

The work before us to forge a ceasefire remains difficult. The challenge of helping a revitalized Palestinian Authority to rebuild Gaza without Hamas is immense. And yet we must first address the immediacy of the humanitarian situation, because lives are at stake — the lives of Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the lives of the hostages, who have suffered mightily since Hamas initiated this horrific conflict on 7 October 2023. We must give Palestinians a future to look forward to, with self-determination, dignity and security. We need Israel to feel secure within its own borders. The United States continues to push for a ceasefire and hostage release deal that allows for a surge in life-saving assistance to Palestinian civilians. There are simply no alternatives that lead to durable peace and regional calm.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome you, Mr. President, and we wish the Algerian presidency every success. We also welcome the newly elected members of the Security Council.

We support the initiative of the delegation of Algeria to convene today's meeting of the Council to discuss the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip in the context of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military operation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which has been going on for almost 15 months now. We thank Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Dr. Peepkorn, World Health Organization (WHO) representative in the occupied Palestinian territory, for their briefings. Special thanks go to Dr. Haj-Hassan for her poignant, courageous and frank testimony, which demonstrates, among other things, the horror being faced by medical personnel and patients, including the children of Gaza. We plan to request a separate meeting of the Council on the topic of children in Gaza, which our Western colleagues unfortunately prefer not to notice in favour of other issues that are, from their point of view, more advantageous.

We are extremely concerned about Israel's continued shelling and bombing of civilian targets in the Gaza Strip. Air raids on camps for refugees and internally displaced persons are reported daily from north Gaza. Amid the hostilities and the blockade imposed by West Jerusalem, a genuine humanitarian catastrophe has broken out in the Strip, compounded by large-scale hunger, outbreaks of infectious diseases and the total destruction of vital infrastructure. The number of refugees and people repeatedly displaced is in the millions. The leadership of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East warned us about the impending famine in the Gaza Strip owing to the lack of humanitarian aid. Israeli attacks often target medical facilities. Furthermore, we have every reason to

believe that the Israeli military, which is obsessed with the collective punishment of the Gazans, has been systematically and deliberately destroying Gaza's healthcare system, and the bombing, shelling, emptying and burning of hospital complexes have become commonplace.

Almost daily reports are coming from the Kamal Adwan, Al-Awda and Indonesian hospitals, which, since 21 December, have become targets of IDF military operations. Attacks, destruction and evacuation orders for the patients of those institutions have left the residents of the besieged northern regions, who are already effectively entrapped, completely without medical care. The Indonesian hospital, which served thousands of Gazans, is no longer operational, the Al-Awda hospital has been half destroyed and a spate of Israeli attacks on Kamal Adwan Hospital — the last major medical facility in the region — have completely disabled it and endangered the lives of 75,000 Palestinians. That raises concerns about the fate of those Gazans who rely on medical care. Under those circumstances, the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who, as we all remember, miraculously survived the Israeli shelling of Sana'a airport in Yemen, said that Gaza's healthcare sector is under serious threat and called on the Israeli authorities to stop attacks on medical facilities and to release the leaders and medical staff of the Kamal Adwan Hospital detained during the Israeli military operation. However, that call clearly fell on deaf ears in West Jerusalem. The peculiar response to it there was the Israeli shelling of the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital, as a result of which at least seven people were killed and dozens were injured.

The inhumanity of Israel's action, which relies on the all-weather support of Washington, is becoming even more obvious given the fact that even before the most recent attacks on hospitals in the north of the Strip, 14,000 people, including children, women and the disabled, were in need of medical evacuation. How can people flee when they are physically unable to do so? Or did the Israeli authorities provide medical evacuation and send those patients to their country for treatment? No, unfortunately, we have not observed any such action on the part of Israel, and we have not even seen any indication of West Jerusalem's interest in resolving those issues through cooperation with the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. On the contrary, humanitarian organizations on the ground are blocked, with restrictions on movement and bans on the delivery of humanitarian aid. Overall, everything is geared towards one goal: to cleanse the Gaza Strip of as many Palestinians as possible and to create unbearable living conditions for those who remain.

In that context, we note that we fully support WHO's intention to organize an urgent mission to the north of the Strip in order to try to move critically ill patients to southern Gaza, where there are still at least some conditions for the provision of necessary medical care. We call on the Israeli authorities to immediately cease hostilities and to ensure the normal functioning of the few medical facilities that are still able to receive patients, which is about 15 out of the 36 previously operating hospitals.

Hospitals should not become a battlefield. They should not be used for military purposes, and medical workers should be able to freely perform their civil, official and moral duties. Those are the basic principles that underpin modern international humanitarian law. What is happening now is a flagrant violation of the methods and rules of warfare, and it must stop. Civilians in conflict must be provided with food and the right to medical care. And, of course, the parties to the conflict have a responsibility to protect those who save lives, namely, medical workers. In Gaza, 1,047 healthcare workers have already been killed — these are shocking figures.

We all understand that the ongoing suffering of civilians of the Gaza Strip will continue at least until the end of the ruthless military operation of the IDF, which is being carried out without regard for the opinion of the entire international

community. The necessary conditions for that will not emerge as long as Washington continues to provide political cover for Israel's actions, blocking any relevant steps and initiatives taken by the Security Council and pumping West Jerusalem with weapons, which continue to kill Gazan civilians. We believe that the members of the Security Council must not remain indifferent to this situation, which is tarnishing the Council's reputation.

We must continue to try to awaken the conscience of our American colleagues and convey to them the importance of abandoning the promotion of parochial unilateral schemes for reconciling Israel with its neighbours without taking into account the need for a fair solution to the Palestinian issue on the basis of the well-known international legal framework agreed upon within the United Nations. The American tactics of stalling for time for the benefit of Israel and forcing the Council to support unsuccessful negotiations that have been ongoing for more than six months, with Washington's mediation on concluding a deal between Israel and Hamas, is also extremely unseemly.

As we are all perfectly aware, the West Jerusalem authorities have repeatedly put forward new conditions for reaching an agreement on a ceasefire and hostage exchange, even abandoning the dubious scheme set out in resolution 2735 (2024). At the same time, responsibility for the derailment of the United States deal is repeatedly pinned on Hamas. Even if an agreement is ultimately reached, responsibility for the deaths of thousands of Palestinians during this time and of Israeli hostages who could have been saved six months ago lies with the outgoing Biden Administration.

Russia's principled position on the resolution of the Middle East situation remains unchanged and is in alignment with the will of the international community. We have consistently advocated — and continue to advocate — an unconditional ceasefire, unfettered humanitarian access, the release of all hostages and forcibly detained persons and the relaunch of the peace process on the well-known international legal basis based on the formula of “two States for two peoples”. Naturally, the Israelis have the right to ensure their own security, but the path to that goal lies exclusively through a comprehensive Middle East settlement process and the realization of the legitimate right of the Palestinians to their own State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only way to achieve sustainable peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis and to eradicate the root causes of the escalation of violence, the repercussions of which have already spiralled far beyond the occupied Palestinian territories, destabilizing the situation throughout the entire Middle East region.

**Mr. Osman** (Somalia): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and to thank you for convening this important meeting today. I express my appreciation for Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Dr. Rik Peeperkorn, representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the occupied Palestinian territory, for their comprehensive briefings. I am also immensely grateful to Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan for her sobering and invaluable briefings.

Somalia is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Gaza and the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people due to the prolonged conflict that has now persisted for over 14 months.

In that regard, I would like to make the following four points.

First, as reported, systematic military operations targeting medical facilities and personnel are particularly alarming. According to WHO, 94 per cent of all health facilities in Gaza are either damaged or destroyed, and only 17 out of the 36 hospitals with inpatient capacity are even partially functional. We have all witnessed the recent destruction of Kamal Adwan Hospital and the abduction of its director,

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, which has put out of service one of the last major health facilities in north Gaza. In that vein, we call for the immediate release of Dr. Abu Safiya, whose detention raises serious concerns regarding human rights and due process. Furthermore, the deliberate attacks against Kamal Adwan Hospital and the numerous other healthcare facilities and personnel are a form of ethnic cleansing and collective punishment against the civilian population in Gaza. We underscore that the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is not negotiable. It is an absolute requirement under international law and international humanitarian law.

Secondly, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as the primary humanitarian lifeline for Palestinian people, cannot be overstated. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedicated and courageous personnel of all humanitarian workers, including UNRWA personnel, who are working tirelessly under challenging circumstances. Any impediment of UNRWA's operations directly threatens the survival of millions of Palestinians, and a deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance is unacceptable and constitutes a clear violation of international law. We urge Israel to heed the strong call of the international community to allow UNRWA to proceed with its aid operations in the occupied Palestinian territories and to lift the long-standing inhuman blockade that severely restricts the delivery of essential services. The civilian population, mostly women and children, is facing severe health issues, including food insecurity, and is experiencing acute malnutrition, a situation that requires our immediate attention as the winter continues. As the occupying Power, Israel has the legal obligation, under international law, to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population are met. That includes the safe return of the displaced to their homes and access to food, water, medical supplies and essential services. Those are binding legal obligations under international law and merit careful consideration and implementation.

Thirdly, the escalating widespread and systematic attacks of the Israeli military in Gaza for over a year is a major concern for my delegation. The toll on human life continues to mount, with implications that extend far beyond statistical measures to affect families and communities profoundly. We reiterate our strongest condemnation of those blatant violations. The argument that security concerns preclude a ceasefire is both morally and practically untenable. There can be no military solution to this conflict. An immediate and unconditional ceasefire is the first step, and it is indispensable for creating conditions conducive to meaningful political discourse and a prerequisite for any meaningful progress towards sustainable and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

Fourthly, the current crisis underscores the urgent need to revive the political process, break the cycle of violence and establish a lasting peace in the region. We reiterate our call that the only viable option for the resolution of the long-standing conflict is the end of the occupied Palestinian territory and full recognition of a free, sovereign and independent Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and General Assembly, under international law.

In conclusion, my delegation urgently calls for full compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law and joins the call for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire. Somalia reaffirms its commitment to supporting all diplomatic efforts towards achieving a just and lasting peace.

**Ms. Lassen** (Denmark): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and Algeria for taking up the presidency of the Security Council this month. Let me also thank High Commissioner Türk, Dr. Peepkorn and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their sobering briefings.

Denmark is honoured to take its seat on the Security Council. It is a responsibility that we do not take lightly and one that we are ready to fully shoulder. Earlier this week, millions around the world came together to ring in the New Year. For most, it is a time of reflection and celebration, a time to be with loved ones. That was not the case in Gaza, where unrelenting hostilities continued to obliterate what remained of the healthcare system. More health workers were killed, wounded and detained. As always, it is innocent civilians who suffer first and most. Many are left without the life-saving care they need. Many are denied access to adequate medical equipment and supplies, fuel, food and specialized healthcare capacities. Put simply, they do not have what they need to survive. This morning's briefing is, therefore, very timely.

Today I will focus on three points.

First, we are deeply concerned about the toll that the hostilities have taken on Gaza's healthcare infrastructure. As we have heard today, the World Health Organization has warned of a pattern of systematic dismantling of the healthcare system in north Gaza. That pattern must be reversed. Most recently, we received the news of a military operation at the Kamal Adwan Hospital on 27 December 2024. That has put the last major health facility in north Gaza out of service and pushed the health system there to a breaking point.

Denmark condemns all attacks on civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including hospitals, which are in violation of international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions. That includes resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of healthcare in armed conflict and resolution 2730 (2024) on the need to respect and protect United Nations and humanitarian personnel. We reiterate that it falls to all parties to protect civilian infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The specific protection of hospitals is critical, and we call on all parties to the conflict to fully respect the special status of hospitals and other medical facilities. While recognizing Israel's right to defend itself in line with international law, we remind Israel of its specific obligations as an occupying Power to ensure and facilitate access to adequate healthcare for the Palestinian population. We call for urgently ensuring that hospitals in north Gaza can be supported to become functional again. Future recovery and reconstruction efforts must also prioritize the restoration of Gaza's medical capacity.

Secondly, Denmark is deeply concerned by the lack of protection of civilians, leading to a staggering number of civilian casualties in Gaza. That includes humanitarian and healthcare workers. Attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza have killed and wounded hundreds among doctors, nurses, medics and other civilians. Such attacks deprive the most vulnerable of the care they need, at the very time when they need it most. In the midst of near-constant evacuation orders, we also note that the transfer of critical patients associated with such attacks poses grave risks to their survival. We condemn any attack on aid workers and medical personnel. They must be protected in accordance with the parties' obligations under international law, including when detained.

Finally, the rebuilding and rehabilitation of Gaza's health infrastructure are crucial, but that is only one element of what is needed to address the abysmal humanitarian situation in Gaza. The sheer level of destruction and devastation outlined by our briefers this morning underscores one clear point: the absolute and urgent need for an immediate and lasting ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas. The Council has a solemn responsibility to maintain international peace and security. We should speak out unequivocally in support of that in order to once and for all alleviate the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians alike and prepare the ground for regional peace and stability for the benefit of all.

We thank Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their tireless efforts to broker a ceasefire between the parties, and we hope that a result will materialize. A ceasefire is fundamental to releasing all hostages, addressing the catastrophic humanitarian situation, initiating reconstruction and working towards a two-State solution. A two-State solution remains the only durable solution to this tragic conflict, which has lasted for way too long. In order to achieve it, we need a strengthened and reformed Palestinian Authority as the foundation of an independent Palestinian State that includes Gaza — a State that will live side by side with Israel in peaceful coexistence.

As we look ahead to this new year, let us recommit to peace and security across the Middle East. Let us redouble our efforts to uphold international law and end the staggering violence that we are witnessing. Let us look ahead with forbearance and courage. The Council has a responsibility to act. Count on Denmark's support.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Türk, Dr. Peepkorn of the World Health Organization and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their sobering briefings.

Since this is the very first meeting of the Security Council this month and year, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency. I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the new members of the Council: Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. I look forward to working closely with them.

The whole world is celebrating the commencement of the new year, but the unfathomable suffering of Palestinians in Gaza shows no sign of abating. We are particularly troubled by the ongoing attacks by Israel on hospitals and healthcare in Gaza, which were detailed by the briefers.

International humanitarian law is crystal clear. Article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention plainly provides that civilian hospitals may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be protected by the parties to the conflict. Civilians, the wounded and sick and medical personnel — all of those people must also be protected under international law. Israel argues that its military operations last week in the area of Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza were limited and based on intelligence regarding the presence of Hamas infrastructure and that more than 240 people whom it describes as terrorists were detained. But it should be noted that article 19 of the Fourth Geneva Convention strictly details the requirements to legally justify the discontinuance of protection of hospitals, including the need for due warning with a reasonable time limit. However, it is troubling that that hospital has been repeatedly attacked by Israel and that, on 27 December 2024, the burning of the facility began while patients were still inside. As such, we call for a transparent investigation and full accountability for any violations.

Indeed, there is no justification, under any circumstances, for harming civilians and medical personnel. The claim that Hamas and other groups have misused the facility simply does not lessen the burden on Israel to observe its legal obligations under international humanitarian law.

However, it is deeply concerning that, despite Israel's argument that the Israel Defense Forces made extensive efforts to facilitate treatment for patients, we have witnessed the contrary in harrowing media reports and viral images of what actually happened at Kamal Adwan Hospital. In that regard, we remain deeply worried about the conditions of those patients who were forced to relocate to other locations, including the non-functional Indonesian hospital. We are also concerned about the impacts on the medical staff arrested at Kamal Adwan Hospital, including the director of the hospital, Dr. Hussam Abu Safia. Their fate must be clarified. Israel should implement every possible measure to ensure the health and safety of patients and medical staff. We also call on Israel to protect the rights of the detainees, including Dr. Abu Safia, and to share information on the charges and on the detainees' whereabouts, especially with their family members.



We note with serious and deepening concern the World Health Organization's announcement that last week's attack on Kamal Adwan Hospital — north Gaza's last major health facility — which led to its complete closure, was not an isolated event. At least 50 attacks have targeted the same facility over the last three months alone. We are also disturbed by the never-ending destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza, as detailed in the recent Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report, including the daily attacks on hospitals and the shortages of medical supplies.

The Republic of Korea therefore reiterates its firm position that there is a dire need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The unfathomable humanitarian suffering of civilians in Gaza cannot be resolved amid the ongoing hostilities. Once again, we call on the parties to the conflict to engage seriously in the negotiations to secure a ceasefire and the release of the hostages. Keeping in mind that their horrific terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 and their continued holding of hostages are the direct cause of the current chaos, Hamas must negotiate in good faith, given the humanitarian imperative. Israel should also make the necessary concessions. We sincerely hope that a complete ceasefire can be agreed and implemented as soon as possible and that it will lead the region, including the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and the Red Sea, to durable stability and peace.

**Mr. Ahmad** (Pakistan): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important briefing at the outset of the Algerian presidency. We commend your stewardship and assure you of our full support. Pakistan looks forward to working closely with all Council members to reinforce our collective efforts for global peace and security.

Allow me to thank High Commissioner Türk, Mr. Peepkorn from the World Health Organization and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their sobering briefings.

The figures are astounding, the picture beyond belief. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Haj-Hassan for sharing the perspectives of healthcare workers, and I think that she asked a lot of questions that are unanswered. Here, in the Council, we must answer those questions.

As we have heard yet again, the situation in Gaza is a catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude. Nowhere in the world has international law been trampled with such brazen impunity as it has in occupied Palestine by Israel, the occupying Power. One aspect of that harrowing reality is illustrated by the recent report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on attacks against healthcare infrastructure in Gaza. It lays bare a truth that we cannot afford to ignore, as you, Mr. President, also explained at length in your statement.

Between October 2023 and June 2024, at least 136 strikes were carried out on 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities. More than 500 healthcare workers lost their lives. By June, 22 of Gaza's 38 hospitals had been rendered non-functional, leaving the healthcare system on the verge of collapse. The brutal destruction of Kamal Adwan Hospital — the last operational major facility in northern Gaza — is an atrocity that shocks the conscience of humanity. The deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel, patients and the wounded defies every principle of humanitarian law and has no justification whatsoever. Beyond mere condemnation, there must be accountability for these crimes.

For more than 14 months now, the Palestinian people have endured an unrelenting assault on their lives, rights and dignity. More than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed, more than half of them women and children. More than 90 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.1 million population is displaced. With around 160,000 housing units destroyed, almost the entire population has been rendered homeless. The scale of the genocidal campaign is staggering, its intent unmistakable. Gaza's homes, schools, hospitals and even cultural heritage lie in ruins. Even the United Nations and its

personnel have not been spared. This is not a war: it is a campaign of dispossession, ethnic cleansing and annihilation. The indiscriminate bombing of civilians and the systematic destruction of critical infrastructure are not isolated incidents. They are calculated acts aimed at erasing an entire people from their homeland.

For decades, the Council has passed resolutions, the International Court of Justice has issued rulings, and the world has cried out for justice. Yet, the Council remains inexplicably paralysed, undermining its own authority and credibility in the process. It is a pivotal moment for the Council to take immediate and decisive action, which, in our view, should be along the following lines.

It must secure a ceasefire now. The Council must demand and put in place an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to halt the bloodshed and destruction in Gaza.

It must ensure that the blockade is lifted. The inhumane blockade of Gaza must be lifted without delay. Food, medical supplies and humanitarian aid must flow freely to those in desperate need.

It must demand accountability. Justice must be served. Independent and transparent investigations into the targeting of medical infrastructure and other war crimes must ensure that perpetrators are held to account. Impunity must end.

It must establish safe corridors. Civilians must be protected. Safe and secure humanitarian corridors must be created to allow people to access life-saving care. Eventual reconstruction efforts must also prioritize rebuilding Gaza's shattered healthcare system.

It must revive the two-State solution. A political horizon is imperative for peace and there must be a process for realizing the two-State solution on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions. There must be an end to the occupation so that the Palestinian people can exercise their right to self-determination and establish a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian State along pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

It must grant Palestine full membership. Palestine must be recognized as a full Member of the United Nations. In our view, that is not just a symbolic gesture — it is a moral imperative to secure the irreversibility of the two-State solution.

We stand at a defining moment in history. The entire world is watching. Will the Security Council shoulder its responsibility, or will it continue to turn a blind eye to the tragedy unfolding before us? Silence is complicity, as you said, Mr. President, and I would add that it amounts to moral bankruptcy. Can we finally come together to defend and uphold universal respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law? I think that that is the question before us. The Palestinian people are looking to the Council for hope, justice and the promise of peace. We must not fail them. The bloodshed in Gaza must end. The relentless suffering of innocent men, women and children must cease. Let us cross the divide. Let us unite in the pursuit of peace, grounded in justice, human dignity and international legitimacy. Let us give meaning to our promise of "never again". Let us prove the sceptics wrong. Let us act now.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I first congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. You know that you can count on France's full support. I would also like to welcome the five new members of the Council. Lastly, I thank Mr. Türk, Dr. Peepkorn and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their briefings.

After 14 months of conflict, the Palestinians of Gaza continue to suffer in undignified living conditions and are still deprived of everything. France once again calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. That is the one and

only way to allow for the protection of the civilian population and the mass delivery humanitarian aid, of which those populations are in such great need. France calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. France will continue to condemn the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023.

The Security Council's resolutions must be implemented. The extreme seriousness of the situation obliges us to do so. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic, including in terms of access to healthcare. France condemns the recent Israeli military operations targeting several hospitals, in particular Kamal Adwan. Israel must comply with international humanitarian law, which demands respect for and the protection of medical infrastructure and personnel. Obstructing humanitarian aid constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law. Israel has a duty to allow the delivery of aid. All crossing points must be opened, the security of convoys and humanitarian actors must be ensured and any restrictions must be lifted. Lastly, France reiterates the irreplaceable nature of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The Council must act both to respond to the emergency and to work towards a political settlement, which requires the effective implementation of the two-State solution. That solution is now being threatened by the acceleration of the illegal colonization of the West Bank. France will participate fully. In June, alongside Saudi Arabia, it will co-chair an international conference on the implementation of the two-State solution. France will remain active in the Security Council to ensure that the Council contributes to that solution, which is the only one capable of guaranteeing Israel's security and enabling the construction of a State for the Palestinians. France calls for the establishment of a reformed Palestinian Authority, capable of exercising its responsibilities throughout the Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip.

**Ms. Persaud** (Guyana): As today's is the first formal meeting of the month, I take this opportunity to congratulate Algeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and warmly welcome the newly elected members — Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. I also commend the United States for its able leadership of the Council in December and extend best wishes to the delegations of Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland, which just concluded their terms. Turning to our agenda for today, I thank Algeria for organizing this important meeting to discuss Israel's ongoing attacks against hospitals and healthcare facilities in Gaza. We are grateful for the updates provided by High Commissioner Volker Türk, Dr. Rik Peepkorn and Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan.

Guyana is deeply saddened that the new year finds the Palestinian people continuing to experience intolerable suffering brought on by Israel's brutal war on Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have no option but to live in tents, exposed to the harsh winter conditions. One of the most devastating consequences has been the freezing to death of babies who are unable to maintain their body temperature and who have no access to the medical infrastructure that could preserve their lives. Last week, the United Nations reported that a series of deadly Israel Defense Forces attacks committed on and near hospitals in Gaza had pushed the healthcare system to the brink of total collapse. Hospitals have been subjected to air strikes, shelled and burned. We also noted from the recent report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that attacks on hospitals for the period from October 2023 to June 2024 reportedly rendered up to 22 out of the 38 hospitals across Gaza non-functional. The situation today is much worse.

There is simply no place where or time when such a state of affairs can be considered acceptable. If nothing else, the dire situation should strengthen our collective resolve to end the protracted war that Israel is waging against the entire Palestinian population. The destruction of Gaza's healthcare system is well

documented. That deplorable situation, compounded by Israel's restrictions on the entry and distribution of medical supplies, has, according to OHCHR, led to the drastic deterioration of health outcomes across the entire population and a health catastrophe of unprecedented proportions, including the spread of infectious diseases such as polio, Hepatitis-A, acute diarrhoea and jaundice. Guyana remains convinced that the ongoing attacks on the healthcare infrastructure in Gaza, including medical personnel, is part of a systematic plan against the Palestinian people. They have been bombed, shot, starved of food and water, arbitrarily detained and tortured. They have also been displaced and forced to live in unsanitary conditions. Those who manage to survive encounter disease and other consequences of deprivation, with little or no recourse to functioning healthcare facilities.

Every time we think that the situation in Gaza could not possibly get worse, it does. Guyana condemns in the strongest terms all attacks on hospitals and medical and humanitarian personnel. As an occupying Power with specific legal responsibilities, Israel must be held to account for its actions. The continued violations of international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank should not be met with inaction. We reiterate that there should be no comfort in calling for adherence to international law without taking tangible steps to bring about such adherence. The Security Council has a special responsibility to uphold international law and ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects across Gaza. Guyana again calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the campaign of violence being waged against the Palestinian people. The two-State solution remains the only viable option.

Guyana commends the World Health Organization and its partners for their tireless efforts to continue providing healthcare, basic medical and hygiene supplies, food and water amid the ongoing chaos in northern Gaza. We call Israel, as the occupying Power, to uphold its legal obligations to ensure that the life-saving, humanitarian and healthcare needs of the Palestinians are met. We also appeal to fellow Council members to work together to bring an end to this ongoing tragedy.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): As this is the first time we meet this month, I would like to wish you every success, Mr. President, during your presidency. I also welcome the new members of the Council and look forward to working with them. I thank the President for convening today's meeting and the briefers for their presentations. It is very appropriate to start the new year with today's briefings as a reality check for the Council.

Security Council briefings are not an end in themselves. They have a purpose — for the Security Council to reflect on the facts heard in order to establish how much the concerns raised threaten the peace, security and well-being of civilian populations and to take action accordingly.

Last year we spent many hours discussing the catastrophic situation in Gaza. Each briefing was more devastating, brutal and apocalyptic than the next. We learned that the health community in Gaza coined a new term: "wounded child, no surviving family". We were briefed about doctors performing amputations without anaesthesia, including on children. We discussed the heartbreaking phone calls between emergency call operators and 6-year old Hind, later found dead, together with paramedics. We had no lack of established facts about the situation on the ground. We spent many more hours, days, weeks and months trying to find a united Council voice — too many times without success — for proper Council action. We start this year with news of babies arriving to the hospital dead on arrival. They froze to death.

The messages from Dr. Haj-Hassan are touching for us all, but they should not come as a surprise. What each of these briefings keeps telling us is that everything needed to sustain human life is under attack in Gaza. The hands of the Security

Council seem to be tied, but these briefings and SOS messages are a reminder of why we cannot give up and need to keep trying for the Council to live up to its name and responsibilities.

Slovenia underlines that Israel, as the occupying Power, has the legal responsibility to ensure and maintain the provision of medical services, public health and hygiene. We are therefore appalled by the findings of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report on the attacks on hospitals during the escalation of hostilities in Gaza. While we followed numerous attacks on, and operations in, major healthcare facilities, the report and High Commissioner Türk in his briefing today highlight a pattern of similar attacks on hospitals by the Israel Defense Forces. The report also addresses allegations regarding violations of the protected status of hospitals and medical personnel.

We are appalled that trauma injuries have not received life-saving assistance, that risks of preventable maternal and child mortality have grown and that access to chronic disease treatments has been lost. Infrastructure vital to public health, including the entire water and sanitation system, have been systematically dismantled, as confirmed today by Dr. Peeperkorn, the representative of the World Health Organization in the occupied territory. Medical evacuations have been restricted, along with essential medical supplies and basic items. Hospitals have been besieged and medical workers attacked, many losing their lives while saving others. The work of UNRWA, the main provider of healthcare services in Gaza, has been challenged, and the list goes on.

Now the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital is being detained after months of repeated attacks and last week's raid, which rendered the hospital out of service and left the patients to fend for themselves. We call for his release. We call for the International Committee of the Red Cross to get access to the detainees in Israeli detention centres, and for ensuring that hospitals in north Gaza can become functional again. We also continue to call for the immediate release of all hostages. We are deeply alarmed about information about an attempted suicide.

The polio vaccination campaign showed that when there is collective will, there is a way. But the occupying Power does not seem to have the will to save civilians in Gaza. On the contrary, with a sense of impunity for its continuous destruction of Gaza, there does not seem to be any humanity left in Gaza — neither for Palestinians nor for hostages.

Hospitals are not and should not be a battleground. That is against the law. We underline the moral and legal imperative of respecting the protected status of hospitals, the wounded and sick, the medical staff and their means of transport and equipment. In that regard, we deplore all violations of that imperative and call for full respect of international law, including all relevant Security Council resolutions. All such people and objects must be actively protected and never attacked or used for military purposes.

Already in October 2023, Slovenia called for an independent, full, prompt and effective investigation of the attack on Al-Ahli Hospital. Today we support High Commissioner Türk's call for independent, credible and transparent investigations of the incidents and attacks on healthcare, including during hospital sieges, leading to full accountability.

There is no convincing argument for this war on Palestinians in Gaza to continue. We continue to call for the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We call for the unconditional release of all hostages, and we call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. We agree with Dr. Haj-Hassan that enough is enough.

**Mr. Kanu** (Sierra Leone): Sierra Leone congratulates you, Mr. President, and Algeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January 2025. We assure you of our full support. We thank and commend the United States for their successful presidency in December 2024.

We further welcome the newly elected members of the Council, namely, Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. We look forward to working collaboratively with the new members and the entire Council in helping it discharge its important responsibility.

As I thank the delegation of Algeria for requesting and convening today's briefing, I also thank Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Dr. Rik Peepkorn, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative for the West Bank and Gaza, the occupied Palestinian territory, for their sobering briefings that describe the appalling situation in the Gaza Strip. In addition, I thank Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan, medical practitioner with the Medical Aid for Palestinians charity, for her compelling contribution.

As we start the New Year, our thoughts and prayers are with the Palestinian and Israeli civilians, who have been subjected to a prolonged war, have lost loved ones and properties, have been displaced from their homes, and with those who are still being held hostage or are suffering from collective punishment. We stand in solidarity with the civilians in the Gaza Strip and those in other active conflict zones, overshadowed by indignity, inhumanity and a series of human-made crises threatening their well-being.

These important words bear repeating — even wars have rules. However, the conflict in Gaza has tested all principles and rules under international law that safeguard the dignity of humankind even in times of conflict. At the heart of those principles is the protection of civilians, including medical personnel and facilities essential to ensuring that humanitarian aid can reach those in dire need and human dignity can be maintained. Despite the protections under international law, the ongoing violence in Gaza has seen repeated attacks on hospitals, healthcare facilities, transportation and healthcare workers — violations that strike at the core of human rights and the very essence of international humanitarian law.

In times of armed conflict, international humanitarian law has made provisions through its humane rules to protect access to healthcare. Those rules bind the parties to a conflict, and they apply to the wounded and sick, medical personnel, medical units and transport. The parties to an armed conflict are not to impede the provision of care by preventing the passage of medical personnel. They must facilitate access to the wounded and the sick and provide the necessary assistance and protection to medical personnel. Generally, States have an obligation to maintain a functioning healthcare system. In situations of occupation, the occupying Power must, to the fullest extent of the means available, ensure and maintain, *inter alia*, medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene.

In the context of the situation in Palestine, it is the responsibility of the occupying Power, Israel, to ensure access to healthcare within a functioning healthcare system and not to destroy the already fragile healthcare system. In the aftermath of the condemnable 7 October 2023 attacks led by Hamas, we have witnessed an unrelenting wave of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, marked by appalling living conditions, a high level of insecurity and air strikes on residential buildings, hospitals and densely populated areas. Sierra Leone is deeply disturbed by the joint statement of the independent United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and the Special Rapporteur on the right to health and their assessment that:

“Israel’s blatant assault on the right to health in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory is plumbing new depths of impunity”.

Similar to the briefing by the WHO representative, the most recent updates from the United Nations and its humanitarian partners highlight the critical status of the health situation in the Gaza Strip, as hospitals have been struck and health workers killed and/or detained, in addition to the unavailability of medical supplies to treat the injured and ill patients. The attacks on and around hospitals have pushed the healthcare system to the brink of collapse, as more than 85 per cent of the healthcare facilities remain non-operational. Recent raids around the Kamal Adwan Hospital — one of the major health facilities in the north — have forced the facility out of service. Health experts have projected that, if care is not taken, sooner than anyone can imagine, the number of deaths caused by disease will surpass those caused by air strikes, as civilians live in unsanitary conditions characterized by the accumulation of solid waste, sewage overflow and exposure to intense weather conditions without appropriate shelter or proper sanitary facilities. We deeply regret hearing reports about the deaths of babies and other civilians owing to poor housing and severe weather conditions. The appalling situation being inflicted on the Palestinians could be irreparable, and it is an outright violation of the dignity and human rights of the Palestinian people.

As we reflect on the more than 45,541 Palestinians killed and 108,338 injured so far in the Gaza Strip, we again urge the conflicting parties to cease all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and avoid any further actions that could claim more lives or cause more injuries. Any circumstances that could lead to deliberate killings of civilians must be avoided at all costs, and we call on the conflicting parties to respect and uphold the rights of all people to life, dignity, food and water — the bare minimum required for human existence.

As we heard from Mr. Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, international law — in particular the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols — unequivocally prohibits the targeting of medical personnel and medical facilities in armed conflict. The legal framework embodied by the principles of humanity and medical neutrality and designed to safeguard human life and dignity asserts that medical units must be respected and protected. Medical personnel, symbolized by the director and medical team of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, should be allowed to perform their duties without interference and should be protected from attack, while medical facilities are to be safeguarded. They are not to be used for military purposes, to maintain their protected status. The systematic exploitation of medical facilities by all sides must stop. It must be clear to all States and non-State actors that international law prohibits attacks and threats against the wounded and the sick, medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.

As a matter of fact, the Security Council has repeatedly reinforced the need for strict adherence to those principles. In resolution 2286 (2016), the Council condemned the targeting of medical personnel and facilities, calling for the protection of medical workers and unhindered access to healthcare in conflict zones. The Council has demanded that all parties to armed conflict must comply fully with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, as applicable, in particular their obligations under the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. The Council has also demanded that all parties to armed conflict facilitate safe and unimpeded passage for medical and humanitarian personnel. Resolution 2286 (2016) also emphasized the critical need to hold accountable those responsible for violating international humanitarian law and to ensure that medical personnel can operate freely and safely. In that regard, we recall the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on the prohibition of intentional attacks on hospitals, places where the sick and the wounded are collected, and medical units.

The international community, including the United Nations and the Council, must hold accountable those responsible for those violations and take immediate steps to ensure the safety and security of medical personnel and the preservation of healthcare infrastructure in conflict zones such as Gaza. It is imperative that all parties involved in the conflict adhere to their legal obligations and respect the sanctity of healthcare in times of war.

Let me conclude with the words of the WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus: the best medicine is peace. The longer we allow this war to persist, the greater the cost will be. We once again demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the release of all hostages, as the first steps to ending the inhumanity in Gaza and ushering in a period of stability in the region.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate Algeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I welcome the fact that Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia are officially taking part in the Council's work. China looks forward to working with all Council members so that the Security Council may effectively fulfil its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. I thank Algeria for the initiative to convene today's meeting. I thank Mr. Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Dr. Peepkorn and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their briefings.

As the new year begins, people expect everything to take on a fresh look. Yet in Gaza, death continues to cast its shadow, and the bombings and attacks by Israel have not ceased, even for a moment. For the people in Gaza, they were not counting down to the happy celebration of the new year but to the next bombing, which could happen at any time. Right before the new year, a heinous tragedy took place in northern Gaza. The Israeli force launched an attack on Kamal Adwan Hospital, the only remaining comprehensive medical service institution in northern Gaza, forcibly detaining medical and care personnel, forcibly transferring innocent patients, causing the deaths of a large number of people and plunging the hospital into a sea of fire. That act seriously violates international law, in particular international humanitarian law. It is appalling, and China strongly condemns it.

It is not the first time that Kamal Adwan Hospital has been attacked, or is it the only hospital in Gaza that has been attacked. According to the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, by June 2024 alone, at least 27 hospitals and 12 medical institutions in Gaza had been subject to 136 attacks, which claimed the lives of more than 500 medical personnel. Protecting the safety of medical facilities in armed conflict is a bottom line under international humanitarian law. Without sufficient evidence proving that medical facilities have become hostile facilities, the deliberate launch of large-scale and indiscriminate attacks against medical institutions that cause casualties of innocent civilians violates international humanitarian law could constitute war crimes. There is also analysis indicating that the lethal attacks launched by Israel against the medical institutions in Gaza to bring the medical system in Gaza to the brink of collapse are part of the systematic strategy to make Gaza uninhabitable. China expresses its grave concerns about and strong opposition to that. We urge Israel to effectively abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, stop turning hospitals into battlefields, stop launching attacks on medical facilities, ensure the safety of medical institutions and personnel and release all detained medical personnel.

The conflict in Gaza has already caused an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe and civilian casualties. As the conflict enters its fifteenth month and comes to the beginning of 2025, ending the conflict and restoring peace remain the most pressing matter and a duty whose fulfilment has been delayed by the Security Council for too long. The country concerned repeatedly claims that a ceasefire agreement will soon be reached, yet the reality is continued killing and death. I



wish to stress that differences in negotiations should be bridged by political will and not be filled with innocent lives. Winning the war does not necessarily mean securing peace, and resorting only to military strength does not guarantee lasting security. China urges Israel to heed the strong calls of the international community and immediately stop all acts of military adventurism. China calls upon Israel to lift restrictions on humanitarian access for Gaza, stop implementing and revoke promptly the bills against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and guarantee safety and facilitation for UNRWA and other humanitarian agencies to carry out their assistance. China supports the Security Council in fulfilling its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and in taking all necessary actions to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, alleviate the humanitarian disaster and implement the two-State solution to respond to the expectations of the international community.

**Mr. Sekeris** (Greece): First, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming your duties and wish you a very productive presidency. And I warmly thank colleagues and fellow Member States for welcoming us to the Security Council. I would also like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, World Health Organization representative Dr. Rik Peepkorn, and Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan for their detailed yet sobering briefings. Their participation here provides valuable insight on the issue at hand.

It has been 14 enormously difficult months for the people of Gaza. Our briefers today, along with those who preceded them in this Chamber over the past year, have tried to describe a situation in the Gaza Strip that is almost beyond comprehension. This is a grave situation that has been in a downward spiral for the past year, while the recent attacks on hospitals have pushed an already inadequate health system to the brink of total collapse.

Greece is extremely concerned that, after more than a year of ongoing conflict in Gaza, an end to the human suffering remains elusive. While we recognize Israel's right to self-defence and the shock that the Israeli society has been through following the deaths of 1,200 citizens and the continuous captivity of 100 hostages for 14 months, we have to remind ourselves that, when all else fails, international law and international humanitarian law are the compass of our humanity. We join our fellow Member States in calling for full respect of the provisions of international humanitarian law, which constitutes the compass and the framework for all operations in Gaza. International humanitarian law tells us that hospitals should not be used improperly for any military use and that no operations should be undertaken against those facilities under the pretence of vague allegations. The destruction of the healthcare system, in combination with the killing of patients, humanitarian workers, medical staff and other civilians, constitutes a severe violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The suffering and dehumanization of civilians must come to an end. All crossings should be open for aid delivery, and sanctuaries should be protected and not turned into death traps for those who were forced to flee. At the same time, it is important for humanitarian aid to be delivered without being pillaged by criminal elements ravaging the area. The operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remain vital for the civilian population.

The current humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip cannot be dealt without dialogue and diplomacy. Military pressure alone is insufficient to defeat terrorism and extremist ideologies. Since the horrific attacks of 7 October 2023 and the pain they have inflicted on Israeli society, hostages remain in captivity, while death, destruction and disease reign over Gaza. It is beyond any doubt that a ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and the urgent, unhindered distribution of aid at scale constitute the only way to turn the tide. The only long-

term solution for the region is to revitalize the political process in order to pave the way for a political horizon for a two-State solution, according to the relevant Security Council resolutions, while recognizing the right of Israel to exist in peace and security.

Only two days ago, we all rang in the New Year, most of us with a New Year's resolution. Ours was to represent our country with dignity in this organ. At this time of the year, I cannot help but think of the people in Gaza and the families of hostages in Israel, and I believe that peace is their demand and their hope for this year — it is a gift worth trying to give them.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month, and I join you and others in welcoming Denmark, Greece, Panama, Pakistan and Somalia to the Council. I thank you, President, for calling this important briefing, and I also thank Dr. Peeperkorn, High Commissioner Türk and Dr. Haj-Hassan for their powerful and compelling briefings and for their teams' work on the ground.

We are all horrified by the deterioration of the healthcare situation in Gaza. It is completely unacceptable that, since 7 October, many medical facilities have been destroyed or damaged and that more than 1,000 medical personnel have been killed, injured or detained. And, as Dr. Haj-Hassan reminded us, their SOS calls have been ignored. Following the forcible evacuation of Kamal Adwan Hospital, there are now no functioning hospitals in North Gaza governorate. Deteriorating access to medical services across Gaza is compounding acute child malnutrition, the risk of imminent famine and the spread of infectious diseases.

As we face this devastating situation, the United Kingdom reiterates three key and fundamental demands.

First, we call for civilians and medical staff to be protected, in line with international humanitarian law. Israel is responsible for ensuring that civilians have access to vital medical care and for enabling medical practitioners to operate safely. The United Kingdom continues to urge Israel to abide by its international obligations, including those set out in resolution 2286 (2016). We also call on Israel to clarify the whereabouts of medical staff detained from hospitals in the north. We are aware of reports of Hamas using civilian infrastructure for their operations, including hospitals. The United Kingdom strongly condemns such actions. By embedding themselves in civilian infrastructure, Hamas clearly put Palestinian civilians and medical staff at risk. We reiterate, however, that obligations under international humanitarian law to protect hospitals and healthcare workers are unconditional.

Secondly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) must be allowed to play its essential role, including in delivering medical services, and we unequivocally reject attempts to undermine its mandate. On 11 December, my Prime Minister committed an additional \$16.5 million to UNRWA to support vital services, including for medical care. The United Kingdom is also supporting the provision of essential healthcare, including through funding to UK-Med to run a field hospital and provide other healthcare services in Gaza.

Thirdly, Israel must do much more to immediately address this crisis, and both sides must finally end this war.

The United Kingdom will keep pushing for an immediate ceasefire, for the release of all hostages cruelly detained by Hamas, for the better protection of civilians, for more aid consistently entering Gaza and for a path to long-term peace and stability.

**Mr. Alfaro de Alba** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Algeria's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. Panama expresses its gratitude to the presidency of the

Council for convening this important meeting, the representative of the World Health Organization for the West Bank and Gaza, Dr. Rik Peeperkorn, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, for their briefings and Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan, of Medical Aid for Palestinians, for her touching statement.

We address the Council today for the first time with a profound sense of urgency and responsibility in the light of the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip and its implications for regional and global stability. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as evidenced by various United Nations agencies, has reached increasingly alarming proportions. More than 45,000 people have died, tens of thousands have been injured, and more than 2 million people have been displaced from one place to another, with urgent needs in terms of food, access to clean water, medical care and shelter, especially given the inclement winter weather. Reports of children who have lost their lives to hypothermia are chilling.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) highlights the fact that basic services in Gaza have been completely devastated, with health services in critical situation and at imminent risk of total collapse owing to severe shortages of medicines, ambulances, life-saving treatments, electricity and clean water. That situation has become increasingly dramatic, to the point that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported in December that, after 14 months of bombardment, Gaza is home to the largest number of child amputees in modern history.

In addition to the risk to life, physical safety and protection, more than 540,000 women and girls in Gaza have an urgent need for access to essential products to ensure their menstrual care with dignity and well-being, which is critical not only to preserve their physical health, but also to protect their integrity and ensure their quality of life in the midst of a humanitarian crisis that continues to worsen.

We are concerned that hospitals, health workers, schools, United Nations facilities and other protected sites continue to come under attack in the armed conflict, hampering the delivery of essential services and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population and, in the view of the Director-General of the World Health Organization, turning hospitals into new battlefields. We express our solidarity with the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who was the victim of an attack in Yemen where he risked his life to safeguard the freedom of United Nations staff members and other civilians.

We strongly reject attacks on humanitarian aid workers and United Nations personnel and their unjustified detention, because they are working in extreme conditions to assist those most in need, risking their own lives. Such acts are unacceptable. We also express deep concern about the information provided in the briefings and maintain that the protection of hospitals in wartime, which should, of course, not be used for military purposes, is essential and must be guaranteed and respected by all parties at all times.

Panama insists on the urgent need to keep border crossings open to facilitate the unimpeded flow of vital humanitarian assistance, including medical and health assistance, and we remind all parties of their obligation to ensure that that aid reaches civilians in need directly, in accordance with the provisions of the resolutions adopted by the Council.

Moreover, after the unjustifiable atrocities committed by Hamas against Israeli civilians on that fateful 7 October 2023, its insistent attacks on Israeli territory and its people are counterproductive. We do not understand Hamas's inexplicable stubbornness in refusing to release the Israeli hostages it is holding captive and who should never have been taken, without as yet demonstrating the political will to seek realistic conditions for an agreement that would lead to an end to the cycle

of violence. It would seem suicidal were it not for the fact that suicide means ending one's own life, while in Gaza, Hamas's stubbornness instead sacrifices the lives of others — the innocent men, women and children of the Palestinian people.

In line with what I have mentioned, Panama reaffirms its commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and regrets the loss of civilian lives, as well as any violation of international humanitarian law.

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

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the brotherly Republic of Algeria on its assumption of the presidency for this month. We wish you, Sir, every success. I would like to thank you for your tireless international effort in defence of the Palestinian people and their just cause, especially in the light of the continued illegal colonial Israeli occupation and its brutal massacre against our innocent civilian population. We have learned from your experience, Mr. President, from your glorious Algerian revolution and from the experiences of peoples under the yoke of colonialism and occupation. History shows that colonialism and occupation inevitably come to an end and that the attainment of freedom and independence is not just wishful thinking. No matter how long it takes, it will eventually become a reality.

We ended the year 2024 discussing Palestine, and that is how we are starting the year 2025 with the Security Council under the presidency of Algeria, which is only normal. The Security Council must end the aggression immediately and without conditions.

(*spoke in English*)

At the start of this year, I also wish to convey our sincere congratulations to the elected members of the Security Council now taking on their responsibilities: Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia. As proven during the past year, the elected members have a very important role to play in ensuring that the Security Council upholds its duties under the Charter of the United Nations, and we assure them of our full cooperation.

We also thank the briefers — the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk; Dr. Rik Peepkorn, World Health Organization Representative for the West Bank and Gaza; and Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan — for their important briefings and compelling testimonies to the Security Council.

I listened today to Dr. Haj-Hassan, as I listened to her at the end of November, when she addressed the United Nations during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (see A/AC.183/PV.420). She is a great humanitarian and is able to very faithfully convey some of the messages of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip from the heart of a super humanitarian to the minds and hearts of those who are responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. On behalf of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, I thank her very much.

The image of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya wearing his white medical gown, a symbol of hope and humanity, summoned and walking towards Israeli tanks, embodying death and destruction, will remain forever a reflection of what is at stake in Gaza — humanity itself. It will show people standing up against all odds in the face of terrible suffering, trauma and death, and it will show how alone they were in that moment.

Palestinian doctors and medical personnel are fighting to save human lives and losing their own. They are fighting a battle they cannot win. And yet they are unwilling to surrender and to betray the oath they took. They are trying to save lives

while hospitals are under attack; while medical personnel are, together with their patients and people seeking shelter, being besieged and killed; while buildings and wards, even for mothers and newborn babies, are being destroyed; while access to medicine is being denied; while electricity is being cut; while starvation is being imposed and while they know that the people they are trying to heal will most probably die and that they, the doctors, will be held responsible by Israel for the ultimate crime of trying to preserve life in Gaza and will be detained, tortured and even killed. And yet, they continue trying.

Dr. Mahmoud Abu Nujaila, who was killed in an Israeli air strike on Al-Awda Hospital, wrote a message many months ago on a whiteboard in the hospital normally used for planning surgeries: “Whoever stays until the end will tell the story. We did what we could. Remember us.” We owe them more than remembrance. Nothing can explain that, for 15 months, Palestinians in Gaza have endured hell and been abandoned to that fate. Nothing justifies the fact that the doctors who were trying to save the lives of victims have become themselves the victims and that the international community was not able to match even part of their courage or their dedication to humanity.

Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh wrote: “We will die standing and we will not kneel ... All that remains in the valley are its stones, and we are its stones.” Dr. Al-Bursh was the head of orthopaedics at Gaza’s Al-Shifa Hospital. He became a familiar face across the globe, as his videos showed him operating on the injured and the dying with little or no equipment and digging mass graves with his colleagues in the yard of the hospital and finally facing the Israeli assault in a hospital where thousands had sought safety. The Israeli army ordered Al-Shifa, its patients, staff and approximately 50,000 displaced people sheltering in the compound to evacuate before setting the hospital on fire. Instead of fleeing, Dr. Al-Bursh made his way to the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza, where he worked until that too came under fire in November 2023. But refusing to renege on his oath, he moved to Al-Awda Hospital where he was eventually arrested by the Israeli occupation forces. Four months later, Ofer prison guards dragged Dr. Al-Bursh and dumped him in the prison yard, naked from the waist down, bleeding and unable to stand, according to a deposition collected by Israeli human rights organizations. He died shortly thereafter. The death of Dr. Al-Bursh while in Israeli custody is not a solitary case. Other doctors and many other detainees died while in custody, after having suffered from abuse, torture and rape.

This is not a war. And, as Dr. Haj-Hassan indicated, this is an assault against Palestinian existence. Its target is therefore life itself in Gaza and all those who are trying to sustain it, all those trying to ensure survival in the midst of this genocide. In line with this criminal intent, it is therefore logical that medical personnel, doctors, nurses and paramedics are among its primary objectives. This is immoral and unbearable, and it must be stopped. The entirety of international humanitarian law rests on a fundamental rule: affording protection to those not taking part or no longer taking part in hostilities — first and foremost, civilians, the sick, the wounded and those detained.

Instead of upholding the cardinal principle of distinction, Israel systematically resorts to indiscriminate attacks, when it does not deliberately target those afforded protection under international law. It does this time after time through same acts, the same patterns, the same criminal and inhumane conduct. It does this through assaults against hospitals, leading to the death and detention of civilians, including babies and children, who are already experiencing hell on Earth. No one should grow accustomed to these horrors.

Israel wants to normalize genocide. According to the report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,

“[t]he attacks on hospitals often followed a similar pattern, involving missile strikes on hospital buildings, the destruction of hospital facilities, shooting of civilians, sieges, as well as temporarily taking over hospital buildings.”

And that is without addressing

“the many cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and ill-treatment of medical personnel and other Palestinians, including internally displaced persons, taken into custody from inside hospitals, which has been reported on elsewhere”.

This is barbaric, and it should lead to not only a repeated expression of outrage, but also resolute action for accountability in order to prevent the recurrence of such horrors. As warned by United Nations experts,

“[u]nder occupation, intentional assaults on healthcare facilities have the potential to expose individuals to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment and many constitute a war crime. In Gaza, this is clearly part of a well-established pattern of genocide, for which Israeli leaders will have to be held accountable.”

There is no justification for the commission of war crimes. There is no justification for the commission of crimes against humanity. There is no justification for the commission of the crime of genocide. There is no justification whatsoever. The International Court of Justice provisional measures and orders aimed at preserving the right of the Palestinian people to be protected from acts of genocide have not only been disregarded by Israel, but they have been blatantly breached, materializing the risk instead of addressing it.

Israeli action can be understood only in the context of the real goals of this war. Remember that we talked about the report of the generals, which we do not talk about anymore. Israeli officials and military commanders have often confessed to them and to anyone willing to hear — some do not want to, some like to hear only what they like to hear. Israeli occupation soldiers have described the actions and instructions of their division. Brigadier General Yehuda Vach, Commander of the 252 Division, stated to *Haaretz* that his aim was to flatten as much of Gaza as possible and to forcibly displace some 250,000 Palestinians who were still present in northern Gaza in order to take over the land. He is building a private militia from settlers, relatives and fanatic soldiers to destroy 50-60 buildings in the Gaza Strip every day and to render Gaza a place where not a single Palestinian could live. He was clear that they needed to “make things hard on convoys that enter and harass them”, according to *Haaretz*. Not only are there thieves who steal the trucks, but Israeli soldiers are watching and facilitating that behaviour, insisting that “there are no innocents in Gaza”. For those who think that this is a war against Hamas and not against the Palestinian people, a Brigadier General currently in the Israeli army, the Commander of the 252nd Division, stated that “there are no innocents in Gaza”. Every individual in the Gaza Strip, all Palestinian people are fair game. But his greatest insanity, in the words of one officer of the occupation army, was the one about “moving the Gazans southward and taking as much land as possible”.

There is a war against the Palestinian people. It is a war of genocide. Its goal is to eliminate as many as possible and to render Gaza uninhabitable. They do not want Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which will extend, later on, to other parts of the occupied territory. Evacuation orders and the destruction of civilians infrastructure, including hospitals, and killings and maiming of civilians, including doctors, have to be understood in that context. Either the Palestinians are displaced or they are destroyed. There is no option other than ethnic cleansing or genocide? And, for the time being, it has meant both.

The images are out there for all to see — images of repeated assaults against our hospitals as part of the assault on Palestinian life and Palestinian existence. One can also see such assaults in the West Bank by the Israeli occupation forces. They keep claiming the use of human shields. They say Hamas used the people in Gaza as human shields, saying how outrageous it is for combatants to use human shields or to pretend to be civilians, when their occupation forces have done both repeatedly. With occupation forces sometimes disguised as civilians or patients, one even pretending to be a pregnant women seeking care with her relatives, have conducted military raids against and within hospitals. That is their behaviour. For those who try to lecture the Council about others using civilians and human shields, that evidence and those stories have been documented, and some of those people were caught in the act.

We salute all the medical practitioners from around the world who have volunteered to help our people in Gaza and all those who have expressed solidarity and provided support to their colleagues in Palestine. Their moral voices give hope to the Palestinian people and to all those who cherish and seek to preserve humanity. Everyone needs to choose whether they stand with hope and humanity — as embodied by the white coat worn by doctors around the world — or with destruction and death. Those who say they have made the right choice need to act accordingly.

Dr. Hussam Abu Safia stated a few weeks before the ultimate assault on Kamal Adwan Hospital:

“I refused to leave the hospital and sacrifice my patients. So, the army punished me by killing my son. I saw him die at the entrance gate of the hospital. It was a great shock. I found a grave for him near one of the hospital’s walls so that he could stay close to me.”

Dr. Abu Safia was himself injured, and he has now been abducted, detained, his fate unknown. He refused to leave the victims behind. Can we not display some degree of that same courage?

The plight of Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, who must be immediately released, is but one story from Gaza among an infinite number of stories of unimaginable loss, trauma, pain, suffering, courage and resilience — a story of a people who, while receiving the solidarity of peoples and countries from around the world, feel abandoned to a terrible fate, enduring a never-ending hell.

It is our collective responsibility to bring that hell to an end. It is our collective responsibility to bring the genocide to an end. We have a duty to save lives. The Council has an obligation to save lives. Palestinian doctors and medical personnel took that mission to heart, at the peril of their lives. They did not abandon the victims. Do not abandon them. End Israeli impunity. End the genocide. End the aggression immediately and unconditionally, now.

**The President:** The presidency of the Security Council will now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Miller** (Israel): The Middle East stands today at a critical juncture, with continued Houthi attacks against civilians in Israel and in the Red Sea, Syria’s precarious position following the fall of the brutal Al-Assad regime, the ongoing firing of rockets by Hamas again just yesterday at Be’eri, where Israeli civilians were massacred on 7 October 2023, and 100 hostages still being held captive by Hamas terrorists.

The presidency called for an emergency session today not to deal with those threats and challenges and not to condemn the terrorists, who are blatantly violating international law by exploiting hospitals as bases for military activity. Such actions negatively impact the credibility of the Council and the international

system. Hospitals are meant to be sanctuaries of care and compassion, yet Hamas has transformed them into tools for terror, exploiting their sanctity to shield its murderous aims and wage war against civilians. That is not an isolated tactic or an act of desperation. It is a deliberate and systematic strategy, a cornerstone of Hamas' operational doctrine — their *modus operandi*.

Though we have known this for many years, the past 15 months have exposed the depth of Hamas' depravity. In November 2023, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops exposed a terror tunnel, 55 metres long and ten metres deep, underneath the Al-Shifa Hospital complex, along with massive caches of weapons throughout the tunnel and the hospital. In that same month, at the Indonesian hospital, IDF forces identified a white Toyota truck used during the massacre of 7 October 2023, located within the hospital compound. In addition, a vehicle with an Israeli license plate and bloodstains that were later linked to a hostage was found in the hospital area.

In February 2024, the IDF uncovered a network of terror tunnels connecting the Turkish Hospital in Gaza City to nearby operational facilities. The tunnels allowed Hamas operatives to move weapons and personnel discreetly, all the while exposing and exploiting the civilian infrastructure of the hospital. In March 2024, the IDF revealed dozens of weapons, millions of dollars in blood money and hundreds of operatives once again inside Al-Shifa Hospital. We found further video footage proving that Hamas took hostages to Al-Shifa following the 7 October 2023 attack and that the hostage Noa Marciano was murdered by a Hamas terrorist within the hospital walls. Just four days ago, on 30 December 2024, Hamas operatives were caught on camera planting explosives a mere 45 metres from the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza. And now, Kamal Adwan Hospital has become the latest site to be exploited by Hamas, a grim addition to their well-documented and public history of abusing civilian infrastructure.

The Council must confront that undeniable reality. Hamas does not respect the sanctity of hospitals, schools or places of worship. It uses them to protect its terrorists, store its weapons and launch its attacks. It uses the civilian population as human shields, playing on the instinct for protecting the vulnerable. At Kamal Adwan Hospital, Hamas turned a facility for healing into a command centre for terror. Since October 2024, following an IDF operation in the area, Hamas entrenched itself in the hospital, embedding its military infrastructure and operational hubs within its walls. Despite Israel's repeated calls, since the start of the operation in October, for the unlawful military use of the hospital to cease, those warnings were again ignored and disregarded. This week's precise operation by the IDF revealed the extent of Hamas' abuse of the facility. Over 240 terrorists were apprehended, including 15 who had participated in the 7 October 2023 massacre — the darkest day in Israel's modern history, on which more than 1,200 lives were brutally taken by the terrorists. Among those apprehended was the hospital's director himself. We suspected him of being a Hamas operative, as hundreds of Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists had been hiding inside Kamal Adwan Hospital under his management. He is currently being investigated by Israeli security forces.

That operation was not a choice. It was a necessity. It was conducted on the basis of extensive intelligence gathered over months, confirming Hamas' activities on hospital premises. In accordance with international humanitarian law, the IDF implemented comprehensive measures to mitigate harm to civilians. Prior to the operation, Israel facilitated the evacuation of 350 patients, caregivers and medical staff from the hospital, along with the delivery of tens of thousands of litres of fuel, hundreds of food parcels and critical medical supplies to sustain hospital operations. As the operation progressed, an additional 95 patients, staff and caregivers were safely transferred to the Indonesian Hospital. That included the provision of 5,000



litres of fuel, two generators and essential medical equipment to maintain critical systems and ensure uninterrupted care.

Israel continues to cooperate with the international community in order to strengthen the medical response capabilities at the Indonesian Hospital. In addition, the IDF worked with the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital to ensure that patients and other civilians vacated the facility prior to the commencement of its precise operation. The operation uncovered caches of weapons, including grenades, firearms, ammunition and other military equipment, hidden within the hospital grounds. As IDF forces operated nearby, they faced attacks from Hamas operatives firing anti-tank missiles and rocket-propelled grenades. That is the stark contrast between Israel and Hamas: while Hamas endangers civilians, Israel protects them, even at the risk of our own personnel's lives. Hamas's exploitation of hospitals is not only a moral abomination but a blatant violation of international law, and far too often, the international response has been silence.

On 17 October 2023, when an explosion rocked Al-Ahli Hospital, many in the Chamber and around the world rushed to pass judgment, parroting casualty figures provided by Hamas terrorists. Those numbers were grossly inflated, and the explosion was caused not by Israel but by a misfired Islamic Jihad rocket. Yet the damage was done, and Hamas's propaganda had achieved its goal. The Council cannot afford to repeat those mistakes. It must not allow itself to be manipulated by those who weaponize the truth. It must maintain its dignity and credibility.

Israel's actions exemplify its commitment to international humanitarian law and principles. Despite the challenges of protecting itself against an enemy that hides behind civilians, Israel continues to uphold its obligations. Over the past month alone, Israel has facilitated the medical evacuation of more than 1,000 patients and caregivers from Gaza for life-saving treatment in 13 countries. Those efforts reflect the fundamental truth that even as it faces relentless terror, Israel remains committed to preserving life.

The issue at hand extends beyond Israel and Hamas; it strikes at the heart of international norms and the principles that govern the Council. If hospitals can be turned into terror bases without consequence and civilians can be used as shields with impunity, what does that say about the state of international law? What message does it send to other terror groups around the world? That is a test not just for Israel but for the Council and the global community. Will we stand by as the sanctity of medical institutions is eroded? Will we allow Hamas to set a precedent, whereby the protection of civilians becomes a shield for terror? The Council must act decisively. It must condemn Hamas's actions in the strongest terms. It must recognize that Israel's operations are not only a response to terror but a defence of the principles that underpin this institution. Israel will continue to protect its citizens, uphold its commitments under international law and do all it can to bring the hostages home. But the Council must meet its own obligations. It must protect the innocent, fight alongside us for the release of the hostages, uphold the rule of law and hold accountable those who seek to weaponize human suffering and civilian infrastructure.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Egypt is honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States today.

The Group would like to congratulate Algeria on assuming the presidency of the Security Council, and we look forward to working with the five new members and the permanent members of the Council. We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting to discuss Israeli attacks on healthcare facilities in the Gaza Strip. We also thank the briefers for their insightful and sobering presentations.

Israel is once again displaying a new heinous level of brutality in its crimes. After targeting civilians and killing more than 45,000 martyrs, 70 per cent of whom were women and children, it has destroyed civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and has killed hundreds of United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers. Israel is now targeting the Palestinian healthcare system in a barbaric way. It has launched a campaign of murder and destruction on hospitals, healthcare facilities and medical personnel. The latest chapter in that campaign has been the destruction of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in north Gaza, which has been rendered non-operational, with all occupants evacuated and all of the hospital's medical personnel and several patients detained.

To understand the scale of the catastrophe brought about by the destruction of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, we refer to the World Health Organization (WHO) statement dated 28 December 2024, which clearly illustrates that this last major healthcare facility is now non-operational. It also referred to the systematic dismantling of the healthcare system and Israel's siege on north Gaza for more than 80 days, which is now jeopardizing the lives of the 75,000 Palestinians who are still in the area. The efforts of WHO and its partners have failed, and this health lifeline in north Gaza is therefore now on the verge of collapse. Furthermore, the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, dated 31 December 2024, highlighted the catastrophic repercussions of Israeli attacks on hospitals in Gaza, which have pushed the healthcare system to the brink of collapse, making it impossible to access basic life-saving treatment or safe locations. In addition to the restrictions imposed by Israel on the entry and distribution of medical supplies, the destruction of the healthcare system in Gaza has led to the deterioration of the health situation and has created a medical catastrophe. The situation is now one of collective suffering.

The facts show that there is no evidence supporting Israel's claims that those hospitals are being used for other purposes. We therefore reaffirm Israel's obligations as the occupying Power to provide medical and health services, and medical and food supplies to the residents of Gaza and to approve relief plans. We also highlight the shortcomings of the Israeli justice system when it comes to the behaviour of Israeli forces. It is important to carry out independent, transparent investigations and to hold accountable those who violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Israel continues to perpetrate one crime after another, boasting about those crimes and justifying them, because there has been no deterrent punishment and no determination from the international community to implement United Nations resolutions to put an end to the violations of international humanitarian law and the laws of war. Israel is facing the following question: why not perpetrate another crime? Why not? The answer is known to Israel, that is why it has continued to implement its plan to turn the Gaza Strip into an uninhabitable area and to strip it of the basic components of human life through a repeated and varied series of crimes. The latest of those crimes is now unfolding before our own eyes: the destruction of the medical system in the Gaza Strip, with one main objective — to implement the systematic policy of forceful displacement by Israel to attempt to kill and liquidate the Palestinian cause.

The Group of Arab States values the mediation efforts of Qatar and Egypt, in partnership with the United States mediator, to reach a ceasefire. We reaffirm the following steps as the only solutions to the crisis.

First, the Security Council must adopt a resolution under Chapter VII for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and deliver assistance to put an end to the forceful displacement policy that aims to liquidate the Palestinian cause.

Secondly, the Security Council must compel Israel through all political and legal means to implement the resolutions of the Security Council and the General

Assembly and the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice since the beginning of the crisis and compel Israel to provide assistance to save civilians from famine.

Thirdly, the Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations to compel Israel to stop attacking hospitals and civilian objects, to immediately release medical personnel and the patients it has detained and to protect them pursuant to international conventions, including resolution 2286 (2016), which is binding for all.

Fourthly, accountability must be ensured for Israel's repeated crimes, especially the targeting of hospitals, doctors and patients, which has been the most heinous manifestation of Israel's ongoing crimes in Gaza since October 2023. Israel must cooperate with the international tribunals to prosecute the perpetrators of those crimes.

Fifthly, all countries that respect international law must immediately suspend their exports of weapons and ammunition used by Israel to perpetrate this slaughter, which has gone on for 16 months, in order to deprive Israel of the instruments of killing and destruction.

The Arab Group once again wonders what stands in the way of putting an end to this war against civilians and why the international community has been unable to stop the daily killing of civilians. We all wonder how long we will continue to watch these dreadful, appalling images from Gaza. How long will the Arabs, the Palestinian people and the brave sons of Gaza continue to be treated as if they were unequal in humanity to the rest of humankind? Would the massacre have been allowed to go on this long had it been perpetrated against another people, against the people of any of the developed countries? Would the bombing of hospitals and the killing of tens of thousands of children have been permitted, along with the scenes of famine and the cries of patients? Would the flagrant violation of international law have been tolerated to such an exaggerated extent?

Israel must know full well that all the crimes that it is perpetrating will not drive the Palestinians to abandon their land, nor will it drive us as Arabs — and alongside us, all peace-loving nations — to abandon them or their cause, which is our chief and central cause. The Arab Group stresses that history is the best teacher. Truth and justice will prevail despite all the Israeli aggression and violations. The Palestinian people will, ultimately and inevitably, attain their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, justified by all the blood of innocents that has been spilled in Gaza.

*The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.*