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Sixty-seventh year

6847th meeting

Monday, 15 October 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Rosenthal	(Guatemala)
<i>Members:</i>	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	India	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Khan
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Mashabane
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 12 October 2012 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2012/762 and which reads as follows:

"I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Monday, 15 October 2012, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: While the world's gaze of concern points elsewhere in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict drifts dangerously in a direction that must be avoided. Both sides maintain their rhetorical commitment to a negotiated peace; however, the creeping realities on the ground and the stalemated diplomacy portray a more worrying situation. Stated intentions to adhere to a two-State solution are not translating into meaningful steps to renewed dialogue on the core issues to be resolved, and this should be a matter of great concern to the Council.

We heard a restatement of these intentions during the speeches of both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to the General Assembly on 27 September (see A/67/PV.12). At the same time, citing the absence of a political process, President Abbas announced his intention and initial consultations to seek an upgrade of Palestine to non-member State observer status — a move that Israel rejects as unilateral and an impediment to resuming negotiations. We hope that this development can be addressed in a constructive manner, and we remind everyone that a negotiated two-State solution, to which both leaders are committed, must remain the highest priority. We fear, however, that the door for such a solution may be closing before our eyes.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLIC) meeting of 23 September brought into sharp focus the severe financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is experiencing as a result of combined shortfalls in domestic revenue, tax income and donor contributions. In his message, the Secretary-General reiterated the United Nations view that the vision of the two-State solution and the institutional achievements of the Palestinian Authority are key elements of stability. Let me repeat today his call for preserving those achievements and for ensuring the Palestinian Authority's fiscal viability by helping to bridge its immediate funding gap. As we have said before, all those States that verbally support the Palestinian people can demonstrate their commitment in a tangible way by offering financial help that provides the Palestinian people with jobs, services and security.

The figures speak for themselves. As of 11 October, the Palestinian Authority had not yet set a date for the payment of Government employees' salaries for the month of September. While recent contributions from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Japan, the Netherlands and France are welcome, they do not suffice. A predictable and immediate injection of new funds is required in order to finance the deficit, which is currently projected to reach \$1.3 billion by the end of the year.

The AHLIC also called upon Israel to help facilitate the sustainable growth of the Palestinian economy by taking further steps to improve the movement of people and goods, development and trade and exports in Gaza and the West Bank, including in Area C and East Jerusalem. Such steps ought to include measures to address the lack of adequate planning for Palestinian communities, as well as measures to develop socioeconomic infrastructure, such as support to the agricultural sector in Area C — an area fundamental to the contiguity of the West Bank and the viability of a future Palestinian State.

The United Nations welcomes the recent approval by the Government of Israel of 15 schools and health centres in Area C, and hopes to see similar action in the processing of the 32 master plans submitted to the Israeli authorities. Indications that plans for six Palestinian localities may soon be published for ultimate approval are also encouraging. Yet further progress to address the planning needs of over 200 Palestinian communities in Area C remains essential.

Violence and other sources of tension on the ground make it all the more difficult to overcome the political stalemate. We remain concerned about security in the West Bank. Twenty-nine incidents involving settler violence resulted in injuries to 10 Palestinians, as well as damage to property. The Dormition Abbey in East Jerusalem was desecrated with graffiti on 2 October as part of so-called price tag activities.

The annual olive harvest, which has just begun, is an important economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians. However, in recent years, the Israeli military has limited access of Palestinian farmers to their olive groves next to settlements to mitigate the risk of violence. In a particularly disturbing development, approximately 7,000 Palestinian-owned olive trees have been destroyed, damaged or harvested by Israeli settlers since the beginning of 2012. We note that on 4 October, the Israeli police arrested three settlers allegedly involved in so-called price tag activities.

We urge the Government of Israel to take effective measures to curtail such acts in the lead up to the harvest season and, more generally, to hold accountable those responsible for violence.

Settlement activity continued. Of note, the outpost of Migron was evacuated to a nearby settlement and the outpost is now used by the Israeli Defence Forces. The United Nations position remains that settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, whether on private land or elsewhere, is illegal under international law and contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map, and should be put to a halt.

On five occasions between 27 September and 7 October, Israeli extremists entered the Temple Mount/ Haram al-Sharif compound, intending to perform religious rituals. Clashes with Muslim worshippers resulted in injuries to five Palestinians, while Israeli forces arrested a number of Palestinians and Israelis for violation of visiting regulations and disturbance of public order. Also, on 4 October over 1,000 Israelis entered Joseph's Tomb near the city of Nablus to perform religious rituals. Despite prior coordination, this move resulted in clashes with Palestinians. The status of Jerusalem and the religious sites are sensitive issues that will be fully resolved only in final status negotiations. In the meantime, we strongly urge all sides to exercise restraint and safeguard the sanctity of religious sites.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis were, comparatively speaking, on the rise during the reporting period. Four Israelis were injured and material damage was caused. Incidents of stone and Molotov-cocktail throwing at Israeli vehicles travelling in the West Bank were recorded on four occasions. On 10 October, an Israeli was stabbed and injured near the Gush Etzion settlement by a Palestinian, who was subsequently arrested by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Citing security concerns, the Israeli Defense Forces had conducted 226 operations in the occupied West Bank as of 9 October, which resulted in 87 Palestinians being injured and 182 arrested. On 25 September, Israeli forces uncovered a weapons cache near Hebron. Almost daily clashes were reported between Israeli forces and Palestinians at the Qalandiya checkpoint. Most injuries took place during Palestinian demonstrations, including against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273).

Allow me to say that the right of peaceful protest must be upheld and that all protests should be kept strictly non-violent.

Demonstrations also took place on 2 October to protest the plight of Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli jails. The United Nations continues to call for a reasonable resolution to those cases and recalls its position that the use of administrative detention must be exceptional and of short duration.

Palestinian security forces continued their efforts to preserve law and order in the West Bank. Between 18 and 19 September, they arrested 57 militants affiliated with Hamas throughout the West Bank, which led to the discovery, on 23 September, of a Hamas underground bunker in the village of Urif, near Nablus.

Palestinian local elections are on schedule for 20 October. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission has been carrying out preparations in accordance with the local electoral law and calendar. Some 4,700 candidates were nominated, nearly a fourth of them women, and electoral campaigning commenced on 6 October. Elections will take place in the West Bank only, as the de facto authorities in Gaza have not allowed the Central Elections Commission to proceed with voter registration and related electoral preparations in Gaza. Meanwhile, in Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu recently announced that he will be presenting a bill to dissolve the Knesset in preparation for early elections.

Turning to Gaza, sporadic eruptions of violence were recorded during the reporting period. A serious escalation occurred when, on 7 October, an Israeli air strike killed an alleged militant and seriously injured another, as well as eight civilians. Some 50 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza into Israel the following day. Another serious escalation took place this past weekend when, on 13 October, an Israeli air strike killed a Salafi leader and his assistant, while two civilians were injured. Yesterday, two Israeli air strikes resulted in three Palestinian militants killed and three injured, including two critically. Overall for the reporting period, a total of 72 rockets and mortars were fired into Israel, resulting in some material damage.

During the same period, Israeli forces conducted three incursions and 11 strikes into Gaza, resulting in the death of 8 alleged Palestinian militants and 1 civilian, as well as injuries to 5 Palestinian militants and 17 civilians, including 4 children. That latest episode demonstrates the continuing fragility of the situation in Gaza and highlights the vulnerability of the civilian population. We continue to condemn all rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. The de facto authorities have the responsibility to prevent and stop all such attacks. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

We must all work to ensure that calm is realized, the closure regime is lifted and the Palestinian divide ends. Regrettably, there is no new progress to report in ending that divide.

Lifting the closure regime in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain fundamental objectives of the United Nations. In that regard, we note the recent transfer of an order of school furniture from Gaza to the West Bank commissioned by the Palestinian Authority. On 19 September, the World Food Programme (WFP) transported 1.2 million fortified date bars produced in Gaza to its West Bank school meals initiative. That WFP initiative was the first such delivery from Gaza to the West bank in five years. Those are positive steps towards reinstating commercial transfers to the West Bank. However, much more is required. Lifting restrictions on the entry of aggregate, iron bar and cement would not only enable the growth of private sector but also provide an additional source of revenue for the Palestinian Authority.

In the meantime, a steady flow of approvals for works involving dual-use material should be maintained. We welcome the recent approval by the Government of Israel of an additional \$38 million worth of project work, including schools, shelters and solid-waste treatment infrastructure, raising the value of United Nations implemented works involving material subject to approval to approximately \$400 million since May 2010.

Turning to the region, tensions on the border between Israel and Egypt raised concern when, on 21 September, three terrorists attacked an IDF position on the Sinai border, and were killed in the ensuing exchange of fire. One IDF soldier was also killed, and another seriously wounded.

A worrying development took place on 6 October, when a drone penetrated Israeli airspace in the northern Negev before being shot down by Israeli forces. Hizbullah Secretary-General Nasrallah has since claimed responsibility for that incident. We note that, in comments reported in the Lebanese media, Lebanese Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour stated that "Lebanon will definitely assume responsibility for Hizbullah's recent action, because the country is in a confrontation with Israel".

The conflict in Syria, now entering its twentieth month, has reached new and appalling heights of brutality and violence. Available estimates, which the United Nations is not in a position to verify, put the number of people killed at more than 30,000. Syrian cities and villages — some of which are part of our world's heritage — are turning into ruins, and archaeological treasures have been looted and destroyed. Such violence is creating fertile ground for terrorism and criminal actions of all kinds. Human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions, torture and summary executions, continue unabated. That includes the continued captivity by the armed opposition of Iranian pilgrims abducted in August. The voices of the peaceful protests that emerged so proudly last year have receded in the tremor of fighting.

Long-standing predictions of the conflict spiralling beyond its borders are coming true, as illustrated by the recent escalation along the Syrian-Turkish border, rounds of small arms fire in the occupied Golan, exchanges of fire into northern Lebanon, as well as a surge in belligerent rhetoric. The Secretary-General has expressed his alarm at the heightened tension between Syria and Turkey following a wave of cross-border shelling that resulted in the death of several Turkish nationals, including children. He has called on the Syrian Government to respect fully the territorial integrity of its neighbours, as well as on all concerned to abandon the use of violence and exercise the maximum restraint.

The Secretary-General has expressed his utmost concern at the continuing militarization of the conflict. He has urged the Syrian Government to declare a ceasefire, to be reciprocated by the opposition armed groups. To succeed, that must be a collective effort by all inside Syria, in the region and beyond. All Governments should desist from supplying arms and military assistance to any party in the conflict, some of which may violate Security Council resolution 1747 (2007). After all the deaths and destruction Syria has suffered, it is plain to see that the conflict cannot be won militarily. And if it were, it would be at an excruciating cost unlikely to lead to a lasting solution that respects the will of the Syrian people.

Our priority remains a political solution, and that is what Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi is trying to help bring about. The Council heard his assessment three weeks ago. He is back in the region as we speak, continuing his discussions with a great sense of urgency and trying to identify the path to a political solution. In his current trip, which has taken him so far to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, he is reiterating the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and an end to arms transfers to all parties.

Despite growing insecurity and significant challenges on the ground, the United Nations continues to expand aid deliveries. We must press all parties to allow unhindered humanitarian access. As winter approaches, we are very concerned at the continued shortfalls in our appeals for funding. As of 11 October, the \$348 million United Nations revised humanitarian plan for Syria was only 40 per cent funded. We urge donors to contribute more generously to address the growing needs of over 2.5 million civilians inside Syria, including over 1.2 million internally displaced persons. Those numbers are increasing by the day. Resources are also urgently required to assist the over 330,000 refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

It is important to preserve calm in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) area of operations, where there is a risk of increased tensions, as illustrated by several security incidents since our last briefing. UNDOF observed an exchange of weapons between groups crossing the border into Syria from Lebanon on 27 September. Deadly incidents involving armed elements from Lebanon and Syrian security forces were also observed by UNDOF in its area of operations on 20 and 29 September.

Finally, on 9 October, soldiers from the Syrian Arab Armed Forces fired shots at two members of Observer Group Golan in a clearly marked United Nations vehicle in the northern part of the area of limitation. Syrian authorities were informed and are investigating the incident. Separately, while the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained relatively stable, the Syrian Arab Republic has sent an official letter complaining about several incidents, including injuries sustained by Syrian children from a landmine explosion on 4 October.

Despite overcoming a spate of security incidents and tensions over the summer, Lebanon continues to be dangerously exposed to spillover from the conflict in Syria. Areas bordering Syria remain volatile, with regular cross-border shelling, including close to Lebanese villages in the northern region of Akkar, some of them several kilometres from the border. The Lebanese Armed Forces stated that it would not allow any side to use Lebanese territory to draw Lebanon into neighbouring tensions, and reaffirmed its determination to confront any violations of Lebanese territory.

However, there continue to be reports of cross-border arms smuggling. On 25 September, for example, a truckload of weapons and military equipment was seized by the Lebanese Armed Forces en route to the Lebanese-Syrian border. After the release on 25 September of a second member of the group of Lebanese pilgrims abducted in Syria in May, nine still remain held.

Of great concern are fresh reports suggesting involvement by Lebanese political forces in support of the parties to the conflict in Syria. Moreover, the explosion on 3 October of an arms depot in the Beka'a Valley town of Al-Nabi Shayth, in which three Hizbullah militants were killed and several other people wounded, was also a reminder of the risk posed by the presence of arms held by non-State actors.

Lebanese public opinion is deeply polarized regarding developments in Syria. Against that backdrop, it is all the more important that the Lebanese Government and political leaders across the spectrum continue to work to preserve Lebanon's unity and stability. Prime Minister Mikati's reaffirmation on 27 September before the General Assembly of Lebanon's policy of disassociation was welcome (see A/67/PV.14). We hope that Hizbullah, too, will fully respect the disassociation policy of the Government in which Hizbullah participates.

We also welcome President Sleiman's initiative in the national dialogue on 20 September to present a first vision for a national defence strategy, including in respect of Hizbullah's arms, which participants agreed to consider as a basis of discussion. The next session of the national dialogue is set for November. We hope that all

Lebanese leaders will seize the opportunity to overcome outstanding divergences with a view to realizing such a strategy in the national interest. In the current regional context, it is in the interest of Lebanon's continued stability that all Lebanese parties continue to exercise restraint and work cooperatively in preparation for the 2013 parliamentary elections.

In contrast with the ongoing volatility in the region, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations remained generally calm.

The number of air violations and mostly inadvertent ground violations of the Blue Line, however, remained relatively high. Despite the temporary redeployment of units of the Lebanese Armed Forces from the UNIFIL area of operations to address security requirements elsewhere in Lebanon, the level of cooperation between the two forces has remained broadly the same. Both parties have an interest in building on this period of calm to protect the achievements along the Blue Line from regional tensions and to take steps to strengthen the cessation of hostilities.

Let me conclude with a reminder that, amid the seismic shifts being felt throughout the Middle East, we cannot afford to be complacent to the persisting deadlock between the Israelis and Palestinians. Despite their apprehensions, understandable in part, neither the parties nor the Council can be impervious to the warning signs of a fading two-State solution. We were all sobered by last month's events in the West Bank. The window of opportunity for taking constructive action to preserve the two-State solution may now be becoming more limited. There is no alternative, sustainable and just solution to negotiated peace. We must therefore continue to make every effort to work towards the fundamental goal. We now collectively need to rediscover with the parties the determination to forge a credible political path forward. We must not let the urgency elude us.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his complete and worrying briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I wish to begin by congratulating you, Sir, and your friendly country, Guatemala, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also express our appreciation to Germany for its wise stewardship of the Council last month.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing to the Council today and reiterate our appreciation to Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing last month (see S/PV.6835) and for his efforts on the ground on behalf of the United Nations and within the Quartet.

Let me also add that we agree with the conclusion of the statement by Mr. Feltman.

Let me also welcome the new Ambassador of Pakistan among us, His Excellency Mr. Masood Khan.

We regret, once again, that we are unable to report any positive developments to the Security Council. Since our last open debate, in July (see S/PV.6816), the political process has remained deadlocked and the situation on the ground has sharply deteriorated. Israel's flagrant flouting of the law has obstructed the resumption of peace negotiations and intensified hardships for the Palestinian people in all aspects of life. It has also thwarted the Palestinian leadership's efforts to strengthen national institutions and realize the legitimate aspirations and rights of our people. That has, in turn, diminished hopes in the peace process and in the prospects for achieving the two-State solution, as indicated by Mr. Feltman, the physical and political viability of which is being severely, if not permanently, undermined by the illegal measures being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Alarming developments in this period have sharply raised tensions and further destabilized the situation on the ground. Extremist Israeli settlers continue to wreak terror and destruction. Military attacks and raids by the Israeli occupying forces, in particular against the Gaza Strip, including over this past weekend, continue to cause civilian casualties and the destruction of property, threatening to fuel another deadly cycle of violence. Thousands of Palestinians remain captive in Israeli jails, subject to deplorable conditions and gross human rights violations, with recurring hunger strikes a matter of the utmost concern. All the while, Israel has continued its illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, further fragmenting its unity and contiguity and gravely impairing the efforts for socioeconomic rehabilitation and development, compounding the humanitarian crisis.

Despite all the appeals and demands by the international community, including by the Security Council in numerous resolutions and by the Quartet, for an immediate and complete halt to settlement activities, Israel has not only continued but intensified its expansionist, colonial drive in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem. In grave breach of numerous provisions of international humanitarian law, the occupying Power persists with its expansion of settlements and construction of so-called outposts, with thousands more units built and planned this year alone; its construction of the wall, which is dissecting and isolating East Jerusalem and walling in Palestinian communities in separated enclaves; its confiscation of vast tracts of Palestinian land, especially fertile agricultural land and areas above water wells and basins; and its demolition of Palestinian homes and displacement of Palestinian families, in particular from East Jerusalem and other vulnerable communities, such as in the southern hills of Al-Khalil and villages in what is often referred to as Area C of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley. That deliberate land grab continues, under the same old and some arrogant new, empty pretexts, all aimed at the de facto annexation of more Palestinian land and the further blurring and breaching of the pre-1967 borders, on which the two-State solution is founded.

Occupied East Jerusalem in particular remains a central target of that illegal settlement campaign, as the occupying Power persists with attempts to artificially and forcibly alter the natural demography, historic character, legal status and Palestinian-Arab identity of the city in order to cement its illegal de facto annexation, which remains unrecognized by the entire international community to this day. We reject all such illegal Israeli measures in the Holy City and demand their immediate cessation, while we reaffirm once again that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian land occupied since June 1967 and is the heart and capital of the State of Palestine.

At the same time, we draw the Council's attention to the rising instability and pressure in occupied East Jerusalem following an escalation of attacks on Muslim and Christian holy places by Israeli settlers and other extremist Jewish groups. Recent months have witnessed repeated attempts by extremists to take over Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, as well as acts of violence and desecration against mosques and churches in the city. Those vile actions have led to several confrontations, including between Jewish extremists and Palestinian worshippers at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, raising alarm throughout the region and the Islamic world, as stressed by His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas and His Majesty King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan before the General Assembly. Those serious concerns have led the Palestinian leadership to call for an emergency high-level meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as of the Al-Quds Committee, chaired by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, to determine the necessary measures to address those deplorable actions and to protect the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem from acts of aggression by the occupying Power and its extremist settlers.

Illegal, destructive actions by the settlers have, of course, not been confined to occupied East Jerusalem. Regrettably, fanatical settlers also continue to rampage throughout the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. They constantly terrorize and harass Palestinian civilians, including school children, elderly persons and farmers. They launch attacks against Palestinian property and agricultural land, with particular ferocity unleashed against olive groves and orchards, with hundreds upon hundreds of trees being torched and uprooted, destroying the livelihoods of thousands of families. Moreover, settlers continue to commit violent acts of desecration against mosques, churches and monasteries in our land, defiling those properties with racist, hateful and provocative slogans that are inflaming tensions and inciting religious enmity. The potential for an escalation of settler terror remains dangerously high, as Israel continues to provide excuses and protection for that depraved lawlessness, rarely holding settlers accountable for their vicious crimes.

The recent period has also witnessed another series of Israeli military assaults against the Gaza Strip. Missile airstrikes and artillery bombardment of Palestinian civilian areas have continued, killing and injuring dozens of people, including children and women, and destroying homes and infrastructure. Such attacks are traumatizing our people, who also continue to suffer the multitude of social, economic, humanitarian and psychological impacts stemming from the continuing illegal blockade and Israeli military aggression against Gaza. We reiterate our demands for the lifting of the inhumane Israeli siege on our people and for respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and the protection of the Palestinian civilian population.

In sum, the political, humanitarian and security situation being faced by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation remains grave. We remain adherent to our conviction that action by the international community is imperative to preventing the crisis from deepening. Serious efforts must be made to overcome the paralysis in the international community, including in the Security Council, especially with regard to ending Israel's impunity and compelling its compliance with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and with the relevant United Nations resolutions. This is a matter of urgency because, in the midst of turbulent crises wracking the region that are also affecting our refugees in the diaspora, the instability and steep decline of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, portend an explosive situation that must be prevented at all costs.

On its part, the Palestinian leadership has continued to act with utmost responsibility to serve its people, uphold its legal obligations and international commitments, and preserve security and calm. It has consistently acted in good will for the sake of peace, repeatedly reaffirming its adherence to the long-standing parameters of the peace process embodied in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, and to the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

All of this has been steadily pursued despite the countless illegal actions to the contrary by Israel, the occupying Power, and the serious obstructions it has imposed. Those include Israeli actions that have debilitated economic activity and development, including continuing restrictions on the movement of persons,

goods and commercial flows, which have undermined the Palestinian Authority's efforts on the ground, undermined donor support for crucial development projects, and contributed to the grave financial crisis we now face.

Indeed, despite all these challenges, as reaffirmed by President Abbas before the General Assembly (see A/67/PV.12), the Palestinian leadership remains committed to the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement by peaceful political, diplomatic and non-violent means. Thus, our efforts have continued to salvage the two-State solution and to create an environment conducive to the resumption of credible, fair negotiations between the two sides.

In early September, President Abbas once again met with Arab foreign ministers in Cairo to consult on the way forward. That resulted in Arab endorsement of Palestinian efforts to secure non-member State observer status for Palestine in the General Assembly during the sixty-seventh session as an interim step, in light of the obstacles before Palestine's application for full membership, due to the situation in the Security Council. We have now embarked on wide consultations towards that end, including the establishment of an Arab ministerial committee and a similar committee here in New York, to assist with consultations with the geopolitical groups.

It is our intention to engage all concerned Member States as we seek the broadest support for this important multilateral initiative, and we hope that it can be acted on by the Assembly as soon as possible. We believe that this effort is positive and constructive, in line with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and consistent with the goal of the peace process — that is, the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. In fact, we believe that this effort constitutes a significant contribution to actually preserving the two-State solution, at a time when Israel is incessantly and recklessly undermining that solution and the prospects for achieving a just peace.

Furthermore, we stress that this initiative is neither an alternative nor contradictory to the peace process, to which we remain committed. We believe that enhancement of the status of Palestine in the United Nations system is our right, consistent with the long-standing historic international covenant with Palestine. Yet, at the same time, we fully understand the need for, and remain ready for, negotiations between the two sides to achieve a just resolution of all final status issues, Jerusalem, the Palestine refugees, settlements, borders, security and water. Thus, last week President Abbas publicly declared the Palestinian leadership's readiness to proceed to peace negotiations with the Israeli Government immediately following the adoption of such a resolution by the General Assembly.

We therefore reiterate our call on the international community, including the Security Council, to do its part to uphold the Charter, to uphold international law, to uphold United Nations resolutions and to uphold the collective responsibility to Palestine. The Palestinian people continue to await justice and to seek their independence and freedom, the fulfilment of their inalienable human rights, and peace and security — the same desires shared by all peoples of our region and the world. At this very critical juncture, we renew our appeal to the international community to support our legitimate efforts to achieve the national rights of our people, including to self-determination and to return, and realize the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital — achievements that will undoubtedly usher in a new era in a Middle East that has long sought peace, stability and security.

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

Mr. Prossor (Israel): First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the architects and earliest champions of the United Nations, wrote, "One's philosophy is best expressed not in words, but in choices". Today, the Middle East is at a critical moment — a moment that calls for leadership. And history will judge today's leaders not by the words they speak but by the choices they make.

I am here today to issue a warning to the world. At this time of turmoil and transition for our region, the stakes are very high. The decisions that are made in these halls in the coming weeks could echo for years to come, well beyond the Middle East.

The duty is clear. It is to support democratic institutions and aspirations, to promote negotiation as the road to resolving conflict and to ensure that all in our region abide by the agreements that they have signed. These are founding principles of the United Nations — principles that are now being put to the test.

Today there is a clear choice between constructive solutions and destructive resolutions. In April, Israel put a serious and comprehensive proposal on the table before the Palestinians in Amman. We spelled out our position. Most people in this Chamber know that. The Palestinians never responded. They walked away, and the world said nothing. Many of the countries represented in this Chamber today did not utter a single word calling on the Palestinians to respond to Israel's offer. They have stood idle as that proposal gathers dust. Instead of sitting with Israel in direct negotiations, the Palestinian leadership is pursuing the path of unilateralism at the United Nations. This is no road to real statehood. It is a march of folly.

Peace must be negotiated. It cannot be imposed from the outside. There are no shortcuts, no quick fixes and no instant solutions. The Palestinians' unilateral actions are a clear breach of every agreement that they have signed with Israel, including the Oslo Accords, the interim agreements and the Paris Protocol. These agreements form the basis for 40 spheres of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation.

I know that some in this Chamber think that the Palestinians can breach these agreements with no consequences. Some think that, afterwards, we will be able to go back to business as usual. Well, they are mistaken. Every Member State that lends its hand to supporting Palestinian unilateralism at the United Nations will be responsible for the grave consequences that follow. How can Israel be expected to abide by the same agreements that the Palestinian leadership ignores whenever it is convenient? How could anyone expect the Israeli public to trust this Palestinian leadership when it signs future agreements? Would anyone make painful sacrifices or give up tangibles in exchange for pieces of paper that the other side has proven more than willing to throw into the garbage?

Symbolic declarations will change nothing on the ground. They will only raise expectations that cannot be met. This is a recipe for instability and, potentially, violence. A General Assembly resolution will not pave the road to peace. No, it will encourage the Palestinians to drive recklessly towards conflict, with both feet on the gas, no hands on the wheel and no eyes on the road. Member States will not be planting the seeds of peace, but fanning the flames of conflict. They will be encouraging the Palestinian leadership to intoxicate its people with fantasy when it needs to sober them up with reality, inflating a dangerous bubble that will inevitably burst. They will be responsible for affixing a seal of approval onto an entity that does not meet the most basic requirements for statehood.

Make no mistake. We in Israel hope that the day will come when they meet those requirements. But let me be clear — today the Palestinians are a very long way from meeting the basic criteria for statehood.

The Palestinian Authority has absolutely zero authority in the Gaza Strip, an area where nearly half the population of the proposed State resides. President Abbas has not seen Gaza, even through binoculars, since 2007. The mandate for his presidency expired in 2009. Three years later, President Abbas continues to personally extend his term, with no regard for any democratic process.

I am sure that many people from the countries represented around this table might be just a little concerned if their politicians decided to personally extend their terms of office for years on end. Yet we do not hear the leaders of many great democracies — some of which are represented around this table — uttering a word publicly about the fact that the Palestinian people have not seen the inside of a voting booth since 2006.

Palestinian leaders claim that they are building the institutions of a modern and peace-loving State. Yet, these same leaders name public squares after suicide bombers, fill textbooks with incitement and seek unity with Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization committed to Israel's destruction — the same organization that fired 40 rockets into Israel in just the past week.

Now, the speakers in this debate thus far have forgotten to mention anything about a human rights report on Hamas abuses. I am sure that these omissions were accidental, mere oversights, but for the sake of clarity, I would like to highlight a few of the findings that were released just last week.

The human rights report documented how Hamas police arbitrarily arrest, torture and in some cases execute innocent people, with absolutely zero judicial protection. Indeed, the report documents 147 instances of torture by Hamas from just 2011. It makes clear that Hamas brutally subjugates anyone who dares to dissent from its extended political agenda: political opponents, human rights activists, criminal defence attorneys and women who go out in public unaccompanied by a man. The only crisis on the ground in Gaza is Hamas, a crisis that is too often overlooked in this Chamber.

The Palestinian Authority claims that it is peace-loving, but dedicates \$54 million in its annual budget to sponsor convicted terrorists and mass murderers with blood on their hands. This year, as the Palestinian Authority threatened to delay payroll for many employees, it tripled its monthly payments to convicted terrorists. Talk about priorities. The Palestinian Authority devotes 6 per cent of its budget to terrorist salaries and less than 1 per cent to higher education. What message does this send? Instead of investing in their children's future, they offer incentives for future terrorists. Instead of using their funds for nation-building, they use them for nation-sinking.

The money the Palestinian Authority lavishes on terrorists does not materialize from out of thin air. It comes from many donor countries that are represented in this Chamber. The European Union (EU) sends more than €500 million in annual EU aid to the Palestinian Authority. How many taxpayers in London, Paris, Berlin and Lisbon know that some of their money is going to convicted terrorists with blood on their hands?

The unrestricted flood of international aid to the Palestinian Authority will not bring us any closer to peace as long as it is used to sponsor, encourage and elevate terrorists. It is time for the international community to finally speak publicly about this reality and to acknowledge the many unresolved questions about the future Palestinian State. These issues cannot be swept under the carpet. They go to the core of resolving our conflict. They are critical to ensuring lasting peace.

Today, there is a clear choice in the Middle East between peace and conflict, between reconciliation and provocation. During the opening of the sixty-seventh

session of the General Assembly, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu demonstrated once again that he chooses peace (see A/67/PV.12). He extended his hand to President Abbas. He reaffirmed Israel's desire to resume direct negotiations with the Palestinians, without preconditions and without delay. He reiterated his vision of two States for two peoples.

On the same stage, President Abbas made a very different choice. Once again, he used the platform of the United Nations to demonize the State of Israel and deny the Jewish people's historic connection to their ancient homeland. He said that the presence of Jews in Jerusalem is altering "the city's historic character and the glorious image of the Holy City as etched in the minds of humankind" (A/67/PV.12, p. 31).

The truth is plain and simple. Jerusalem had a Jewish character long before most cities in the world had any character. It was the capital of the Jewish people long before Homer composed The Iliad before Romulus and Remus founded Rome, and before the armies of Alexander the Great swept through the Middle East. Jews have lived continuously in Jerusalem for 3,000 years, from the time that King David built his great palace in the city's rolling hills.

By denying the history of the Jewish people, the Palestinian leadership plants the seeds of intolerance in their next generation. They raise doubts about their commitment to peace. It is time for the international community to speak clearly, openly and publicly against this incitement. It is time for all in this Chamber to say that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people and Jerusalem, our capital, is its beating heart.

Mutual recognition is the key to securing lasting peace. I often point out during these debates that one will never, ever hear any Palestinian leader say "two States for two peoples". You will not hear them say "two States for two peoples" because today the Palestinian leadership is calling for an independent Palestinian State but wants millions of its people to flood the Jewish State. That would mean the destruction of Israel. No one who believes in peace could ever accept it. It is a non-starter. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community has the responsibility to tell them the truth. It has a duty to stand up and say that the so-called claim of return is a non-starter. Yet many who are so vocal in telling Israel what it needs to do for peace stutter, mumble and lose their voices when it comes time to tell the Palestinians this basic truth.

Today there is a clear choice between complacency and leadership. Over the past 30 years, the Hizbullah terrorist organization has killed tens of thousands of men, women and children in attacks spanning dozens of countries and five continents. Working with its Iranian patrons, Hizbullah has killed families on vacation, peacekeepers sleeping in their barracks and diplomats carrying out their official business.

Iran has provided Hizbullah with funds, training and advanced weapons to hijack the Lebanese State and transform it into an outpost for terror. Just last week, Hizbullah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, publicly admitted that Iran had provided the military drone that his organization sent over Israel. One does not need any further evidence that Hizbullah is a direct proxy of the Iranian regime.

Hizbullah's continued provocations could have devastating consequences for the region.

I want to make this perfectly clear, so that no one in this Chamber can say that they did not hear me or did not understand me: Hizbullah's continued provocation and military buildup could have devastating consequences for the region.

Not all Lebanese are so happy that Hizbullah is using their country as its playground. As former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri said last week, Lebanon is not an unmanned drone. He reiterated "deep concerns over the uncalculated risks which Hezbollah wants to drag Lebanon into".

Nasrallah claims that he needs a private, independent army — with more missiles than many NATO members — to defend Lebanon against Israel. Today, on the streets of Homs, Hama and Damascus, we see that Hizbullah's army is far more preoccupied with butchering their Arab brothers and sisters in Syria.

Ahmadinejad and Nasrallah sit on Bashar Al-Assad's advisory board, offering the tyrant of Damascus guidance on how to butcher the Syrian people more efficiently. Together they form what I call a trio of terror. I know that there is no shortage of those willing to express their "commitment to Israel's security" in these halls. Yet such displays of commitment to Israel's security have been difficult to find over the past six years, as Hizbullah has turned southern Lebanon into a giant storage facility for 50,000 missiles.

Some countries around this table continue to define Hizbullah as a charitable and political group, not a terrorist organization. That is no less ridiculous than describing the Mafia as a gentleman's social club. In many European countries, Hizbullah is raising money from supporters as if it were the Red Cross. Nasrallah recently admitted that being placed on a European terrorist list would "destroy Hizbullah", drying up many sources of financial, political and moral support.

How much longer must this absurdity continue? How many more innocents must fall victim to Hizbullah's terror before Europe acts? It is time for all responsible nations to call Hizbullah exactly what it is: a global terrorist organization.

In this Chamber today, the need for leadership is clear. Later in this debate, Iran will speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In other words, the world's greatest sponsor of terrorism will speak to the Security Council on behalf of roughly two thirds of the countries represented in the United Nations.

What a sham, and what a shame. It is time for all those Non-Aligned Movement countries that care about peace and security to realign the Movement. It is time for the international community to finally act to stop the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons. With every day that passes, the enriched uranium in Iran piles higher and higher.

One can only imagine what that Ayatollah regime would do with the dangerous combination of extremist ideology, advanced missile technology and nuclear weapons. An Iranian nuclear bomb would be the mullahs' greatest dream and the world's worst nightmare. And with the very worst nightmares, sometimes the only way to stop them is to wake up.

The hour is getting very late. The red line is very clear. The world must stop Iran before it is too late.

For Israel, the lessons of history are very clear. Real security — and real peace — can be secured only in the real world, not in the fantasyland of vague statements and empty resolutions.

To those truly committed to the security of Israel and the Middle East, to those committed to a two-State solution, I say: act tangibly, speak out publicly and show us concretely. The choices are very clear. They can recognize Israel as the nation-State of the Jewish people, or allow the Palestinian leadership to deny our history without consequence.

They can work to end the Palestinian Authority's incitement and support for terrorists, or allow hate and extremism to take root for generations to come. They can say publicly that the so-called claim of return is a non-starter, or they can allow this claim to remain an obstacle on the road to peace.

They can choose to support direct negotiations and talks around the table or to undermine them with unilateral resolutions at the United Nations. They can choose to look the other way at Hizbullah's terror, or show the political courage to stop the organization in its tracks. They can choose to stand idle as an Iranian nuclear bomb becomes a reality in the Middle East, or they can take action before it is too late.

Today I say to the leaders of our region, to the members of the Council and to each and every Member of the United Nations: these choices are yours. The fate of the Middle East hangs in the balance. The time to act is now.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

I will begin with Syria, where the horrifying situation is getting worse. Escalating violence driven by the Al-Assad regime has killed tens of thousands and displaced millions of Syrians. There is no clearer demonstration of the situation's threat to regional peace and security than the Syrian Government's recent shelling of Akakali, which the Council rightfully condemned.

As the violence and atrocities mount, the United States will not wait for all members of the Council to get on the right side of history. Together with our allies, we are supporting the opposition as it moves towards an inclusive, democratic transition. We are further pressuring the regime and addressing the growing humanitarian needs in the region. At the same time, we continue to support the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi to find a durable solution to the crisis.

As President Obama told the General Assembly last month, "the future must not belong to a dictator who massacres his people" (A/67/PV.6, p. 14). The regime of Bashar Al-Assad will come to an end. Indeed, that transition is not just inevitable; it has already begun. Al-Assad's merciless assault upon the Syrian people has not cowed them into submission; far from it. The opposition is getting stronger, and parts of Syria have slipped from the regime's control. In those areas, Syrian citizens are banding together to administer towns, reopen schools and rebuild their economy. The United States is helping them do so, providing the unarmed civilian opposition with help to organize in support of the transition plan agreed in Cairo last July, with its vision of a democratic, pluralistic Syria where all of its people have a say in how they are governed.

More than 1.5 million people have fled their homes either to neighbouring countries or to safer places within Syria. As the number of refugees grows, we commend Syria's neighbours, including Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, on their generosity and recognize their need for additional support. The United States has committed more than \$130 million in food, medical supplies and other life-saving assistance.

We encourage all Member States to respond to the needs identified in the United Nations Syria appeals and to coordinate closely with the United Nations in responding to the crisis. As the Syrians plan for transition, we are looking for additional ways to support Syrian efforts to document serious violations of international law, including the indiscriminate bombardment and deliberate targeting of civilians.

No one can deny that Al-Assad's war against the Syrian people now poses real challenges to all Syria's neighbours, including Lebanon. From deadly attacks by the Syrian regime across the border to tens of thousands of refugees, Lebanon is already suffering the consequences of the conflict. Hizbullah's active and growing support for Al-Assad's war exposes Hasan Nasrallah's claims of promoting Lebanon's national interest as nothing more than a deadly form of deception. The group's leaders may try to change the subject by invoking hollow rhetoric about a so-called resistance but the truth is plain to see. Nasrallah's fighters are now part of Al-Assad's killing machine and Hizbullah leaders continue to plot new measures to prop up a murderous and desperate dictator with Iran.

We encourage the international community to counter Hizbullah's terrorist activity and to do more to expose its deepening involvement in Al-Assad's war. We commend the Lebanese Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces, in particular, for maintaining stability and law and order at this critical juncture. We welcome the efforts of President Sleiman and others to promote dialogue, including with respect to the disarmament of illegal militias, as called for in resolution 1559 (2004). We reiterate our firm commitment to a stable, sovereign and independent Lebanon.

Turning to Middle East peace efforts, as President Obama said in his address before the General Assembly last month: "The road is hard, but the destination is clear: a secure, Jewish State of Israel and an independent, prosperous Palestine" (ibid., p. 14). We actively support the creation of a Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution as a result of direct negotiations, without preconditions, between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Unilateral actions, including initiatives to grant the Palestinian Authority non-member State observer status at the United Nations, would only jeopardize the peace process and complicate efforts to return the parties to direct negotiations. Any efforts to use international forums to prejudge final status issues, which can only be resolved directly by the parties, will neither improve the daily lives of Palestinians nor foster the trust essential to make progress towards a two-State solution.

We remain focused on helping Israelis and Palestinians to improve the environment between them and to address the Palestinian Authority's chronic fiscal crisis, in particular. We recognize the serious financial challenges facing the Palestinian Authority and its vital efforts to sustain the institutions of governance that it has built. The Palestinian leadership has taken several steps to address its financial challenges but it needs our help. We appreciate the support of Israel and of the wider donor community to provide the financial resources to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people.

We all understand the severity of the current economic situation in the Palestinian territories and the consequences of inaction. In parallel, we urge continued international support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to further its efforts to provide the necessary assistance for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza and elsewhere until a final negotiated solution is reached.

Lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis requires both parties to take meaningful steps. Palestinians should continue their security cooperation, further strengthen public institutions and end incitement. The onslaught of rockets fired by terrorists in Gaza must cease immediately. We condemn those attacks in the strongest terms. Israel should step up its efforts to deter, confront and prosecute anti-Palestinian violence and extremist hate crimes, including vandalism at religious sites. We agree with President Peres that "holy sites must not be harmed".

In the West Bank, the recent and repeated destruction of Palestinian olive groves, which are a critical source of income for the local population, is deplorable. We look to the Israeli authorities to act decisively to protect those resources and to investigate such acts.

Like every United States Administration for decades, we do not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. We continue to oppose any efforts to legalize outposts. The fate of existing settlements must be dealt with by the parties, along with other permanent status issues.

Indeed, the road to peace is long and hard, but the United States remained fully committed to helping the parties to reach peace through a negotiated two-State solution.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I also listened carefully to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

China is deeply concerned about the long-standing stalemate in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks and the economic and humanitarian difficulties facing the people of Palestine. In September 2011, the Quartet set the end of this year as the deadline for reaching an agreement between Palestine and Israel. The Middle East peace process is now once again at a crucial crossroads. The question of Palestine has always remained the crux of the Middle East issue. The long-standing stagnation of the Middle East peace process is not conducive to peace and stability in that region. The regional turbulence should not divert the international community's attention from the Palestinian question.

China has always advocated that the parties concerned should, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace in the Middle East, resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiation and achieve the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace with the State of Israel.

China urges the two sides to take practical steps to remove barriers to the peace talks in order to seek an early resumption of the peace talks and subsequent progress. Israel should assume the responsibility for taking the first step. We urge Israel to immediately stop the building of settlements, to lift the blockade on Gaza, to release Palestinian prisoners and to improve their living and medical conditions. We urge Israel to actively cooperate with the international community in such efforts towards peace in order to create the conditions for relaunching the peace talks with Palestine.

The international community should increase its sense of responsibility and urgency for advancing the Middle East peace process. It should work actively to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table and to promote measures by both sides to rebuild their mutual trust. China hopes that the Quartet will play an effective role and come up, as soon as possible, with a proposal for the resumption of the peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

China supports a greater role for the Council in helping to restart the Middle East peace process. We have always backed Palestine's just pursuit of the restoration of its legitimate rights as a nation and its establishment as an independent State with full sovereignty on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also support Palestine's membership in the United Nations and other international organizations.

China is extremely worried about the continuing tension in Syria, as the Syrian issue has a bearing on peace and stability in the Middle East. Any solution to the question of Syria should be based on observation of the purposes and principles of the Charter and on the basic standards governing international relations. It should also be based on respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity and on continuing implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, Kofi Annan's six-point plan and the final communiqué of the Geneva meeting.

China is against any external imposition of a settlement on Syria and any efforts towards so-called regime change. A political settlement is the sole viable way of defusing the crisis in Syria; military means would only lead to more pressure and greater conflict. It is urgent that all forms of terrorism or violent acts in Syria and any efforts to encourage or abet a resort to military means be halted forthwith and that a political transition, led by the people of Syria, be started instead. China calls on all of the parties in Syria and the international community to cooperate with and support Joint Special Representative Brahimi in performing his good offices in the effort to reach a political solution to the Syrian question.

China is concerned about the impact of the current Syrian situation on its neighbours. We call on the parties concerned to bear in mind the overall interest of regional peace and stability, to respect one another's sovereignty and territorial integrity, to continue to exercise restraint and to refrain from any action that could lead to an escalation of the situation, so that everyone can work together to maintain regional peace and stability.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are deeply disturbed by the present momentum of affairs in the Middle East peace process, or, rather, the lack of it. Trust between Palestinians and Israelis is close to zero. Israel's settlement activities are reaching alarming levels. Acts by Jewish extremists in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, are also intensifying. The desecration of both Christian and Islamic religious sites is unacceptable, especially under conditions where interreligious and intercultural relations in the region are already tense.

There are periodic rumblings around the Gaza Strip. We condemn the shelling of Israeli territory, which threatens the lives of the civilian population, as well as the actions from the Israeli side that injure peaceful Palestinians. Both sides must show restraint and respect the ceasefire. In such a fragile situation, when simply maintaining the status quo cannot prevent the eruption of new crises, the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations must be resumed.

In that regard and in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, the Quartet must step up its efforts. We believe it would be a mistake not to convene a ministerial meeting of that group on the sidelines of the general political discussion at the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. Another important aspect is the restoration of Palestinian unity. Without concluding that process, based on the platform of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, arriving at a full Palestinian-Israeli settlement, let alone putting it into practice, is impossible.

Our support for Palestine and its participation in the work of international organizations is well known. We therefore believe that initiatives to gain broad international recognition of Palestinian statehood, including in the Security Council, the General Assembly and the specialized United Nations bodies, should be seen as complementing the efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict with Israel, rather than serving as an alternative. They should absolutely not be used by the Israeli side to turn the screws on the occupied territories or put any other pressure on the Palestinian Authority, and that call also applies to the other actors in the area of Israel and Palestine.

Alongside its political and diplomatic work, Russia will continue its efforts to provide the Palestinians with donor assistance. In the past few years Palestinians have

received Russian humanitarian financial support for education and health amounting to three tranches of \$10 million each. We are continuing our tradition of financial assistance to the Palestinians in education, whereby Palestinian students receive 150 Government stipends annually. More than 500 students are currently studying in Russia. This year, we plan to open a middle school for Palestinians in Bethlehem. In addition, Russia is providing food aid to Palestine through the World Food Programme and in 2013 will make a one-time voluntary contribution of \$2 million to the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

It has become a tradition during meetings on Middle Eastern issues to discuss the situation in and around Syria. We cannot but be perturbed by the unending bloodshed in that country. Among the armed opposition, the impact of those forces using the bloodiest means — acts of terror and attacks on peaceful citizens — grows ever louder and more frequent. The most recent examples are the terrorist acts in Aleppo on 3 October, in the suburbs of Damascus on 9 October, and the massacre of the civilian population in the villages of Al-Heydariya and Al-Hassaniya, near Homs. Support for the fighters from abroad is not only continuing but, based on everything we have heard, seems to be growing. Illegal shipments of arms have been sent, and the world media are increasingly talking about the presence, in the opposition's ranks, of mercenaries, trainers and jihadists linked to Al-Qaida and other international terrorist networks.

Russia's approach to dealing with Syria is unchanged. Violence, whatever its origins, must cease. The Action Group's Geneva communiqué remains current and necessary. We call on all clear-thinking parties to work together on the basis of consensus in order to arrive at a settlement without delay. The Syrian authorities have publicly voiced their support for the Geneva agreements and have appointed a negotiator. We await similar steps from the opposition. We expect that they will follow after the upcoming meeting in Doha. In that regard, our hopes lie with the mediation capabilities of Mr. Brahimi and his team, as well as the sincere, constructive involvement of regional and international actors in the quest for a rapid and unconditional end to the bloodshed in Syria. That is our shared and primary task.

Mr. Mehdiyev (Azerbaijan): I would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, for organizing this debate on a very important topic. We are also grateful to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his comprehensive and informative briefing.

We would like once again to express our profound concern about the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. In spite of occasional contacts between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, the prospects for direct talks have so far been deadlocked. It is clear that there is no alternative to peaceful negotiations, and we call on the parties to create the conditions conducive to their resumption. Mutual confidence and continued dedication on the part of all the parties and international actors in the peace process are essential to achieving tangible results.

We know that the Middle East Quartet has been maintaining close contact with the parties in an attempt to bring them back to the negotiation table. However, we cannot remain oblivious to the fact that the current situation is going nowhere. In that regard, it is pertinent to remind the Council that responsibility for the stalemate and possible failure of the process rests not only with the parties concerned but, first and foremost, with the entire international community. It is clear that success depends on a number of critical factors, among them the need to ensure that the process and efforts are guided by the normative standards set by the Charter and as well as by the goal of a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

We express our serious concern over the continuing settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, which place a tremendous burden on civilians, cause serious obstruction to the peace process and, more dangerously, threaten the two-State solution and the emergence of a viable Palestinian State. The international community must take the necessary actions to make it clear that violence, forcible displacements, the demolition of houses, the construction of settlements and other illegal activities must cease immediately and without preconditions. Having said that, it is essential to underline once again that, in assuming its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council must react adequately in order to put an end to illegal practices and policies and ensure that international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected.

It is alarming that the economic, financial and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remains troublesome. The issue should be continuously addressed by the international community, and urgent measures should be undertaken to alleviate the suffering of people in need. It is also important to fully utilize the advantage of cultural diversity by promoting intercommunal dialogue and reconciliation, while categorically rejecting and invalidating any manifestation of ethnic and religious intolerance. We reiterate our support for the application of Palestine for admission to membership of the United Nations and look forward to an early solution to that issue, based on international law.

International assistance and participation in tackling the challenges faced by the countries of the region is vital to securing achievements and working on shortcomings. The United Nations and its specialized agencies and field presences, as well as regional organizations, are best positioned to deliver such assistance, and their efforts deserve to be adequately recognized.

Lastly, we believe that, among other valuable efforts and initiatives aimed at contributing to the achievement and maintenance of regional peace and security, the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction could be a unique opportunity for all States of the region to take a collective stand on their security. In that regard, we welcome the initiatives aimed at generating relevant discussion and facilitating the work towards that objective.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, allow me to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Today's debate on the Middle East and the Palestinian question is not a mere ritual on the Security Council's agenda. In recent months, we have witnessed a process of political and social clamor in which citizens, particularly in the Arab world, have called for recognition of their fundamental rights and for an institutional change to pave the way for democratic practices and the strengthening of the rule of law. Although significant progress has been made, we also note that, in some countries, violence and repression have been imposed. In response to that dynamic, we believe that this discussion should serve to underline the increasingly urgent need to engage in dialogue and actions conducive to establishing peace in the region.

In the case of Syria, the high level of violence and destruction and the constant flow of arms to all parties is disturbing. We believe that the militarization of the conflict is only aggravating the situation and putting civilians in ever more serious danger.

We regret the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation, not only in Syria, but also in neighbouring countries, due to the impact of the thousands of terrorized refugees fleeing the violence. Despite the appeals of the international community, Syrian forces continue to attack densely populated areas and to make indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, tanks and air assets against civilians, while the opposition undertakes actions that deepen hostilities.

We maintain our position of support for a political solution to the situation in Syria, and we therefore reiterate our support for the work of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to put an immediate end to the violence and to obtain humanitarian access in order to facilitate a transition to a democratic and plural political system, in accordance with the six-point plan, resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), and the 30 June final communiqué of the Action Group on Syria (S/2012/522, annex) and with the support of the international community.

We call on the Government and opposition of Syria to cease their fire and allow for dialogue and reconciliation, as expressions of coexistence in search of a better future. This is even more urgent as we see the impact of the crisis leading to increased hostilities towards neighbouring countries. That must be immediately controlled in order to avoid the spread of disastrous consequences.

I would like to address the question of Palestine, since we believe that, due to the dramatic developments in the Middle East, it is urgent to achieve progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. That is a concept that all members of the Security Council endorse. It is appalling that the guidelines established by the Quartet on 23 September 2011 have not yet been implemented. It is important that the parties resume meaningful talks with the support of the international community. We believe that the parties should make their best efforts to create an environment conducive to the resumption of direct negotiations for a two-State solution, with a viable Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel within defined, secure and internationally recognized borders.

The fragility of the situation is clear. There have been repeated incidents, such as the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, some of which have been directed towards urban centres. Such indiscriminate attacks must absolutely cease. We insist that all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law. The status of Jerusalem requires a negotiated solution. There is an urgent need to find special arrangements that ensure full respect for all religious and cultural rights of the parties and for their holy sites.

From the institutional standpoint, the viability of a future Palestinian State requires continued international support for the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to strengthen its institutions and improve its serious financial situation in order to revitalize the Palestinian economy. We must also follow the Palestinian reconciliation process under the leadership of President Abbas, as a unified Palestinian Government is essential to achieving lasting peace.

The international community should contribute to the creation of a legitimate and balanced framework that facilitates a viable political process. We must understand that our efforts will lose credibility if we continue to fail to take the decisions necessary to enable an environment in which human rights and international humanitarian law serve as the basis for rebuilding confidence and facilitating serious engagement between the parties in order to move forward in the negotiations.

My delegation shares concern over rising tensions in Lebanon, the Syrian-Lebanese border incursions, dual-track arms trafficking and the increasingly frequent

presence in Syrian territory of elements associated with Hizbullah. It is urgently necessary to adopt measures to prevent such practices as kidnapping and hostage-taking as a means of retaliation against certain communities in Lebanon.

We highlight the policy of President Sleiman to dissociate himself from the Syrian crisis, as well as the actions taken by his Government and other countries of the region assist the thousands of Syrians who have sought refuge in those countries. In that regard, we welcome the talks of the Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon, Mr. Derek Plumbly, with Prime Minister Mikati related to the support that the Lebanese Government provides to thousands of Syrian refugees who are currently on its territory.

In conclusion, we wish to express our concern over the recent increase in violence in Iraq, and we urge all Iraqis to commit themselves to a search for effective solutions of their differences through dialogue and reconciliation. In that context, we welcome the appointment of the members of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission, which will clear the way for the holding municipal elections.

We welcome the culmination of the process of relocating the residents of Camp Ashraf, as it paves the way for the camp's peaceful and definitive closure under the terms of the memorandum of understanding. We also thank the residents for their cooperation and the Government of Iraq for providing the guarantees necessary for their transfer to Camp Hurriya.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to start by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the representatives of Palestine and of the State of Israel for their statements.

In this debate, I will address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian crisis and the situation in Lebanon.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation on the ground has seen no tangible progress since the Council's last meeting to examine the issue. Concerns persist as the hope for a two-State solution — Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security — evaporates, due to ongoing unilateral initiatives and provocations by both parties.

On the one hand, settlement activities have not halted. Settlement construction and the expulsion of Palestinian families continue, as does the blockade of the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, rocket firing and other provocative acts from the Gaza Strip towards Israel have not ceased. While Palestinians fight to regain their confiscated land, Israel defends its legitimate right to its existence and to security.

My country believes that although both parties clearly have rights they wish to exercise, the only acceptable solution should be that of peace, mutual acceptance and coexistence. That is what the international community, including the Security Council, has worked towards for decades. However, given that the lack of success with regard to the two States is perceived as a failure on the part of the Council, the situation should prompt the Council now to review its many resolutions and the various initiatives by outside players and partners.

In that context, my country believes that the effective implementation of the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative should be firmly supported — indeed, demanded. At a time when it is important to relaunch the various initiatives, both parties equally must show unfailing political will to begin the negotiations necessary to achieve a lasting settlement of the question.

In that respect, the Togolese delegation welcomes the recent proposal by Minister Barak to dismantle dozens of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Such an approach will certainly constitute the beginning of a disengagement, which my country strongly encourages. Here my country takes the opportunity to request that the Israeli authorities ensure an effective disengagement — in other words, not to free up one zone simply to occupy another in the West Bank.

Similarly, Togo encourages the continuation of informal meetings between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It calls upon the Quartet to continue its efforts so as to make progress in the negotiations on issues that divide the parties. In our view, the resumption of negotiations is urgent, and any preconditions to resumption will only delay a settlement of the issue. We also believe that the negotiations should include all parties. That is why we call upon Hamas and associated groups to renounce violence and to work with the Palestinian Authority within the framework of direct negotiations.

Now I will take up the situation in Syria, which is on the cusp of setting off the entire region if the Security Council does not take the measures required by the level of danger. If the worst that all of us fears were to happen, our Council will have failed in its responsibilities as defined by the Charter of the United Nations.

The events of 3 October, including the bombing of the Turkish village of Akcakale, which claimed five victims, and the rapid and determined response of the Turkish authorities have strengthened our fear. The Council's firmness in condemning that bombing and other suicide car bombs in Aleppo are an encouraging sign, yet they are not enough to put an end to the determination of all parties to the conflict to use all violent means.

In the light of the scale of the war on the ground, Togo believes that the Security Council should use all means at its disposal to lead all parties to the conflict to effectively implement Kofi Annan's six-point plan and the Geneva Action Group for Syria communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), while awaiting new proposals to settle the crisis, which will be presented by the Joint Special Representative for Syria, Mr. Brahimi. For the time being, my country calls on all parties in Syria to halt without delay massacres and massive violations of human rights, briefly, violence of all types, as well as the destruction of their own country.

On the issue of refugees and displaced persons, my country expresses its gratitude to the donors and humanitarian organizations for their multiform and ongoing support. Faced with the continuing violence, the international community will need to further mobilize to increase the necessary humanitarian aid for refugees and displaced persons, whose numbers continue to increase each day.

As for Lebanon, we welcome the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), pursuant to resolution 2064 (2012), given the role of that Force in maintaining peace and security in the country. The continuing occupation of Ghajar by the Israelis and ongoing tensions along the Blue Line justify that measure. I reiterate our gratitude to the countries contributing troops to UNIFIL and pay tribute to all of its military and civilian personnel for their efforts in the service of peace in southern Lebanon. We also wish to encourage them to work to strengthen their cooperation with the Lebanese armed forces and the Israel Defense Forces.

While Lebanon is experiencing internal problems that it is attempting to resolve through a national dialogue that is scheduled to resume on 12 November, the war in neighbouring Syria has exacerbated the situation, particularly with regard to security. The deadly clashes in August between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli demonstrated the real impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The flow of Syrian refugees, estimated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to be close to 80,000, is additional cause for serious concern, given the growing insecurity caused by the situation at a time when the Lebanese Government must face many other security situations in the south of the country, along its borders with Israel and in the zones where Hizbullah and other armed groups are carrying out all types of activity in total impunity.

My country congratulates the Lebanese authorities for the urgent steps they have taken to put an end to inter-communal violence in Tripoli and to address the flow of refugees into their country. We urge them to work to prevent violence and to further secure their border with Syria.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their valuable statements.

The Arab world has been undergoing unprecedented transformation during the past two years. The democratic aspirations of people in several countries are being addressed through national political processes. However, it is regrettable that the Palestinian question and the related Arab-Israeli issues have remained largely unaddressed and resolved. Also, the Palestinian application for full membership of the United Nations, submitted more than a year ago, has not evinced any positive action from the Security Council despite the overwhelming support of States Members.

The issue of Palestine is facing the real danger of getting relegated to the sidelines. The current period of stalemate in the Middle East peace process is perhaps one of the longest since the signing of the Oslo Accords 19 years ago. The efforts of the Quartet can at best be described as feeble and have failed to break the stalemate. If the current situation continues, the international community will risk destabilization in the region.

We therefore call for serious efforts to arrest the trend. If there is one decision that can help revive the peace process, it is an end to settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. The settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is creating a new reality on the ground and threatens the very premise of a two-State solution. Settlements, roadblocks and the related infrastructure of occupation have also exacerbated the humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people and adversely affect the normal functioning of Palestinian State institutions. We join others in urging Israel to stop its settlement policy without further delay.

The blockade of Gaza has entered its sixth year and is causing severe hardship to the population. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, and essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development have been disrupted. Israel should immediately lift the blockade and allow the resumption of normal socioeconomic activities in Gaza so that the Gazans can rebuild their lives and reduce their dependence on external assistance.

The recent measures taken by Israel — including the transfer of tax revenue, increase in work permits issued to the Palestinian populations, allowing visits of Palestinian families to Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli detention, and so on — are positive. However, those measures are inadequate to address the magnitude of the problems and need to be built upon to promote mutual trust and confidence between the parties. In that connection, it is important to avoid violence on all sides and ensure that the legitimate security interests of all parties are met.

We note the reconciliation process between the Palestinian factions, which is crucial. We hope that efforts taken towards the promotion of reconciliation will bear

fruit soon, leading to the formation of a unity Government, the holding of elections, the reunification of Palestinian State institutions, and measures for the reconstruction and development of Palestinian society.

The financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is currently facing is eroding the significant progress made by the Authority in building State institutions. There is an urgent need to support the Palestinian Authority to meet its budgetary shortfalls. In that regard, we welcome the commitment shown by the international community at the recently held meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 23 September.

On our part, India has continued to support the Palestinian State-building efforts. President Abbas visited India in September. During his visit, three agreements were signed for the establishment of an information and communications technology centre of excellence in Palestine, the provision of technical and vocational educational training equipment and services for the Palestinian Ministry of Labour, and the construction and equipping of two secondary schools. India will also contribute \$10 million to Palestine's budget for this year, as we have done in the two previous years.

During the visit of President Abbas, India reaffirmed its firm support for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel. We strongly support all efforts towards the realization of that objective, including Palestine's enhanced status in the Organization, as announced by President Abbas during the general debate of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly last month (see A/67/PV.12).

We remain seriously concerned at the deteriorating situation in Syria. We strongly condemn all violence and violations of human rights, irrespective of who their perpetrators are. We also condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist acts that have been and continue to be committed in Syria. We call upon all parties to dissociate themselves from terrorist groups and ensure that no space is provided for such groups. We urge all parties to cooperate with Joint Special Representative Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi to resolve the crisis without any further bloodshed through an inclusive Syrian-led political process that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Before I conclude, let me state that, while the Palestinian question remains at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there are other Arab lands under occupation. A final and comprehensive settlement of all Arab-Israeli issues is necessary for enduring peace in the region. India stands ready to play its part in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Mashabane (South Africa): We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing to the Security Council. We would also like to thank the Ambassador of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Since joining the Council some 22 months ago, we have seen very little progress in the Middle East peace process, in particular the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One year has now since passed since the Quartet committed to facilitating the resumption of the much-awaited direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. That deadline has come and gone with no significant progress towards the resumption of talks. We welcome the ongoing quiet talks between the parties, which serve as a confidence-building measure that could help to soften their respective positions as they seek a window of opportunity to resume direct talks.

In the absence of any substantive progress in the peace process, we once again question the value and the credibility of the Quartet to which the United Nations has outsourced its responsibility. In our assessment, it has not proven its strategic worth. Therefore, let us urgently review the mechanism and either bolster, adjust or disband it. In reviewing the mechanism, we could focus, inter alia, on its composition, mandate and accountability.

There is an urgent need to focus on the plight of the Palestinians. They expect a lot from us. They deserve better, and we need not fail them. Political and economic events elsewhere in the world should be allowed to derail the peace process, which is by far a better solution than ongoing confrontation and violence.

The prospects of peace and a two-State solution are quickly diminishing. The recent reports of violence by Israeli forces using missiles, air strikes, artillery bombardment and drone missiles fired against Palestinians in Gaza are worrying and should be condemned in the strongest words possible. Equally, we condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into southern Israel. In fact, the Security Council needs to speak out against those heinous acts of violence. Having said that, we must also point out that we are not so naive as to think that such a condemnation would quickly come out of the Council. We are well aware of the circumstances that may hinder the Council from doing that.

Israel continues its blockade of Gaza in blatant defiance of international law with impunity, as the Council has not been able to ensure compliance with its own decisions, including resolution 1860 (2009). The application by Israel of collective punishment on the population of Gaza is a grave violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, and should be denounced by the Council. The latest report of the United Nations country team in the occupied Palestinian territory, entitled "Gaza in 2020 — A liveable place?", states:

"The people of Gaza remain worse off than they were in the 1990s, despite increases in real gross domestic product per capita over the past three years. Unemployment is high and affects women and youth in particular ... The challenges will only become more acute, particularly if the current political status quo continues".

Given that reality, it is urgent that the blockade be lifted. Concerned about the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people, South Africa has increased its donation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to \$2 million.

South Africa once again condemns the continued settlement construction, which violates international law and the resolutions of the Council. Those activities remain the foremost stumbling block to the resumption of the peace talks. Clearly, the continuation of the settlement greatly jeopardizes the realization of the two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders.

Israeli settlers continue their act of aggression against the Palestinians almost on a daily basis. The demolition of homes, mosques, churches and cemeteries cannot be tolerated. The destruction of agricultural projects, orchards and olive trees and setting fire to farm produce, which is the means of survival for the Palestinians, is deeply worrying. Recent evidence of such acts are the destruction of olive saplings and grape vines in the village of Al-Khader, near Bethlehem, and the burning of olive trees in the village of Beitillu, near Ramallah. Those acts of aggression take place with impunity, as the Israeli Government seem unwilling to hold the settlers accountable.

South Africa regrets that Israel has reneged on its agreement to improve the living conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. We call on Israel to improve their living conditions in order to end the ensuing hunger strike. Palestinian prisoners have long lived in appalling conditions in Israeli jails, and the international community has not done much about their plight. It is time that meaningful pressure be brought to bear on the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law with regard to all Palestinian political prisoners by ensuring their safety, allowing access to them by family members, and respecting their basic human rights.

The efforts of Egypt to reconcile the Palestinian parties are indeed commendable. We encourage the Palestinian parties to forge ahead with their reconciliation efforts in order to consolidate the Palestinian gains and to become a formidable and coherent political force that will robustly advocate for the permanent liberation of the people of Palestine.

South Africa supports Palestine's bid for United Nations membership and the announcement in the General Assembly a week ago by President Abbas of his intention to seek non-member State observer status. We call on the international community to provide support to a permanent and sustainable political solution, namely, the implementation of a two-State solution providing for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

South Africa is concerned, however, about the critical financial challenges that the Palestinian Authority faces. Those challenges have the potential to reverse the gains made by Palestine in its institution-building project and to render the country unstable as service delivery declines. In that regard, we call on Israel to urgently lift all restrictions to allow for the development of the private sector, trade and other economic activities that could stimulate economic growth and address the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability in the short to medium term.

On the situation in Syria, South Africa remains concerned about the ongoing violence in the country and pledges its support to Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to Syria. We call on all parties to stop the violence that continues to claim civilian lives, including those of women and children, and has led to a sharp deterioration in Syria's relations with some of its neighbours.

In conclusion, South Africa calls on the international community, including the Security Council, to abandon the business-as-usual attitude and to design new intervention strategies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. We have waited too long; the time for further delays and double standards is a luxury that neither the international community nor the people of Palestine can afford. We need to act decisively and to do so now.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): Allow me to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his insightful briefing.

Last month, the Council met for a high-level debate on peace and security in the Middle East. The Secretaries-General of the United Nations and of the League of Arab States both called for a fresh and united approach by the international community to a changing Middle East. In that spirit, we adopted a presidential statement encouraging closer cooperation between the United Nations and the Arab League (S/PRST/2012/20) — a joint commitment that must now be brought to life.

Above all else, we must together address two pressing issues: the crisis in Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Let me start with a few points on Syria. With the shelling of Akçakale, Turkey last week, the crisis there has reached yet another nadir. That was not the first time that Damascus has taken violence beyond its borders. But this time, the bombs not only killed an innocent Turkish woman and her four children, but they also violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our NATO partner. The Security Council unequivocally condemned the shelling in the strongest terms. Despite all divisions, the Council has sent a clear message that it will not tolerate Damascus threatening regional peace and security. We continue to hope that the Council will also soon find unity in supporting a political transition process to a new post-Al-Assad Syria.

Let me be clear. No matter how many letters the Syrian delegation sends to the Security Council, and no matter how much Damascus portrays itself as the innocent victim of external aggression and terrorism, its deadly action on the ground speaks for itself. We also encourage the opposition in Syria and beyond to work towards a unified political platform.

On Friday, the Council met with the independent international commission of inquiry to the Syrian Arab Republic. Its findings show a clear pattern of gross and systematic human rights violations committed by the Syrian authorities and orchestrated at the highest level. Abuses are also being committed by the anti-Government groups, although not comparably in scale and organization. It is my Government's firm conviction that accountability for such grave violations of human rights has to be ensured. The findings of the commission will provide a solid basis, including possible action by the International Criminal Court.

The Syrian people deserve our support. The crisis of internally displaced persons and refugee will worsen with the winter approaching, putting further strain on neighbouring countries. We welcome the efforts of the relevant United Nations agencies in neighbouring States in providing support to Syrian families in need. Germany will continue to be a reliable partner in providing humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering.

These days, the Middle East process makes fewer headlines than most other events in the region. That is because the process is stalled, not because it is in any way less urgent. On the contrary, with every day that goes by, the concerns over the viability of a two-State solution become more acute. Mr. Feltman highlighted that in clear words in his briefing. The security and stability risks posed by the status quo should instil in everybody a sense of urgency.

Since the beginning of this month, dozens of rockets have been launched from Gaza against residential areas of southern Israel. Those are terror attacks which we condemn in the strongest terms. At the same time, we urge Israel to exercise its self-defence with utmost restraint.

On 20 October, Palestinians in the West Bank, except for East Jerusalem, will vote in local elections. That will be another step towards the consolidation of good governance and democracy in the future Palestinian State. Under current conditions however, the Palestinian authority has no resources to pay salaries or services for the rest of the year.

What is at stake here is more than a mere budget problem. The very achievements of a successful State-building process under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad are at risk.

We therefore call on all donors to come through on their commitments of support. For its part, Germany will continue its significant level of assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

Beyond that immediate need, however, the financial crisis can only be overcome through economic development. Such development will not be possible without a political perspective. Above all, Palestinians must be able to move freely on their land and have access to Area C. We need to see increased control by the Palestinian authorities over those areas, in line with the Oslo Agreements and the road map. We call on Israel to work with the Palestinian Authority towards realizing that objective.

During the general debate of the General Assembly this year, both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas reaffirmed their support for a two-State solution and their willingness to reach it through negotiations (see A/67/PV.12). Negotiations are the only way to get the process back on track. We strongly encourage the Middle East Quartet to expand its efforts to frame and support the process.

We strongly believe that progress on the Middle East peace process would contribute to regional stability and offer new opportunities for the region as a whole. Ten years ago, the League of Arab States showed foresight and courage in adopting the Arab Peace Initiative. In this time of transformation in the region, Israelis and Palestinians must now prove their will to shape their national destinies.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his very comprehensive and sobering briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

Portugal naturally aligns itself with the contents of the statement to be delivered later by the Observer of the European Union.

Let me first address Syria. As the conflict continues to spiral out of control at an intensified pace, so does the enormous human cost it entails. Last Friday, at an Arria Formula meeting, Security Council members heard a chilling account from the Independent Commission of Inquiry of the horrific human tragedy that is taking place in Syria. The death toll rises every day, and an already dire humanitarian situation is worsening continuously. Sectarian tensions are increasing dramatically and threatening the fabric of the country. Widespread and systematic gross violations of human rights proceed unabated and with total impunity.

Let me once again reiterate that this situation is totally unacceptable and that all violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity must be investigated and that their perpetrators will be brought to justice.

The shelling by the Syrian armed forces of Turkish territory has once again demonstrated the serious threats the Syrian crisis poses to regional peace and security. Portugal has condemned those actions in unequivocal terms. Such violations of international law, which furthermore victimize innocent civilians, are simply unacceptable. They must cease immediately, and the Syrian Government must fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all its neighbours, who already bear the brunt of assisting many thousands of Syrian refugees.

As I have often stated in the Chamber, there is no alternative to a political solution in Syria. Further militarization would lead to no end, except to yet more human suffering. Even if one side were to eventually vanquish the other, long-lasting peace in Syria will only thrive if based on a political agreement that gathers support from all segments of Syrian society. The intent to pursue a military option will only deepen sectarian rifts, radicalize positions and threaten the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, while eroding the conditions of sustainable peace and regional stability.

The violence must stop if the necessary political space for a genuine inclusive and representative political tradition that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrian regardless of their affiliation religion or belief is to be created. As we have often repeated, we stand firmly behind the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and League of Arab States. Portugal once again calls on the parties to view the appointment of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as an opportunity for them to rethink their options, end the violence and engage seriously in a peaceful political resolution to the conflict.

But if the Joint Special Representative is to succeed, the Council has to exert united, sustained and effective pressure on all sides, and on the Syrian authorities in particular, in the light of their primary responsibilities, and place itself at a centre of efficient, sustainable and legitimate action by the international community.

As we continue to strive to bring an end to the bloodshed in Syria and support the democratic transitions under way in the Arab world, we must not lose sight of the Palestinian question, as my German colleague just resolved — an issue that remains the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, no comprehensive and enduring regional peace in the Middle East will be possible as long as Palestinians are deprived of their freedom and sovereign State. That is both their inalienable right and a matter of justice for the Palestinian people.

Nevertheless, it seems that the two-State solution, which had become the stated objective of the parties themselves, not the international community, is drifting ever further away. Indeed, Israel's illegal and intensified settlement activities are eroding the territorial basis of such an objective — the very land on which a contiguous and viable independent Palestinian State is expected to emerge.

Moreover, settlements and unpunished settler violence, which has spared not even religious sites or places of worship, evictions of Palestinians from their homes, the demolition of their property and destruction of their livelihoods, as we heard from Under-Secretary-General Feltman, are not only condemnable, but are also exacerbating tensions and undermining confidence in a peaceful process and solution, as well as weakening moderate voices.

The Security Council cannot continue to shy away from its responsibilities in this context and remain impassive while the prospects for a Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel are rapidly withering away and long-adopted Security Council resolutions continue to be systematically ignored.

The Council must urgently renew efforts with a view to the swift resumption of meaningful direct talks based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the agreements previously reached by the parties. Such talks need to be completed within a reliable time frame, as the Palestinian people need a political horizon for the establishment of their State.

Palestinian achievements in preparing for statehood are also today at risk due to the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis and the insufficient easing of Israeli restrictions. Portugal welcomes the positive steps Israel has taken in that regard, which have been alluded to this morning, but more must be done, as others have already underlined today.

In the most immediate term, our priorities should be to ensure that the achievements, for which the Palestinians have so diligently worked, are not reversed. I can assure the Israeli Ambassador that Portuguese taxpayers will carry on, in the framework of the European Union, to do their share.

However, we cannot ignore that the problem remains a political one — a continued occupation that curtails the development of a sustainable Palestinian economy,

thus forcing Palestinians to be donor-dependent. Palestinians must be able to explore their resources, including in Area C, without which there can be no viable Palestinian State.

Portugal fully understands and supports Israel's legitimate security concerns and recognizes its right to self-defence, consistent with international law. We once again vehemently condemn the rocket attacks from Gaza, which must stop immediately.

The security of Israel remains a key aspect of any sustainable peaceful settlement. This is a matter to which we must all — Palestinians, Israelis, their neighbours and the international community — seriously commit in the framework of a comprehensive settlement.

There is only one way to fully ensure Israel's long-term security, and that is by ending the occupation, settling all core issues and claims between the parties, and fully normalizing diplomatic, political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world, as foreseen in the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, the Middle East is living in a time of change and uncertainty, of opportunity but also of danger. Israelis and Palestinians must seize the opportunity to engage diligently and truthfully with each other in order to bring about a sustainable and comprehensive peace in the region. There is no alternative to a political solution, as Under-Secretary-General Feltman rightly underlined.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): Since this is the first time I am taking the floor in the Security Council, I convey my warm greetings to you, Sir, and the other Permanent Representatives in the Council. I look forward to working closely with all of you. It is a privilege for Pakistan and for me to be part of this eminent body of diplomats and statesmen, who focus all the time on the pressing issues of peace and security.

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his useful briefing.

We align ourselves with the two statements to be delivered later by the Permanent Representatives of Iran and Kazakhstan, respectively, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The debate here today, along with the attention to the issue of Palestine in the General Assembly, shows that the discourse on Palestine is not completely frozen. The Council itself, at its high-level meeting last month (S/PV.6841), heard world leaders speak about the compelling reasons to address the Palestinian issue. Yet there has been no movement towards resumption of the suspended peace process. In the meantime, the human rights and humanitarian situation of Palestinians living under occupation continues to deteriorate.

The Quartet's inability to meet on the sidelines of the General Assembly has been seen as a setback. The global consensus on the goal of the two-State solution reflects the wisdom and maturity of the international community. But that goal remains elusive and empty without constant engagement and practical steps towards its achievement. Pakistan supports the rights of the Palestinian people and an independent Palestinian State and favours the admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. In the interim, we endorse the Palestinian Authority's initiative to achieve non-member State observer status. We respect the Authority's decision about the exact timing of that initiative.

The Secretary-General's report pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/17 states that there has been little progress in the past year. That is disappointing. He is of the view that the current impasse in the peace process is undermining the viability of a two-State solution. The Secretary-General expresses his concern that "we are increasingly moving away from a two-State solution into a one-State reality" (S/2012/701, para.50). The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reached a similar conclusion in its annual report (A/66/35), which stated that the status quo may usher in a one-State reality with unpredictable consequences. Nobody wants such a drift or such an outcome. There is evidence that the illegal Israeli settlement policy has remained the biggest roadblock to the resumption of the Middle East peace process.

The United Nations country team in Gaza presents, in its latest report, an extremely bleak picture. The illegal blockade of the territory and the collective punishment being meted out to the population of Gaza must cease. Recent intensification of the military bombardment of the Gaza Strip threatens to destabilize the situation further. The lack of political perspective for Palestinian youth and the continuing settler attacks on Muslim and Christian Holy sites are fuelling violence. The Security Council must take note of that growing threat.

On a broader plane, the Security Council must ensure and monitor implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and its other resolutions on the subject. As we have said before, the Secretariat should provide the Council with a matrix of the implementation status of the resolutions adopted by the Council on the question of Palestine.

The State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority have been widely applauded. The Secretary-General has said that the steps taken by Palestinian Authority to build robust State institutions and revive the economy have brought security and economic improvements. The admission of Palestine into UNESCO as a member last year is yet another recognition of the success of those efforts.

Core issues and questions must be addressed for a lasting peace. We call for a solution of the question of Palestine in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid terms of reference and the Quartet road map. The resolution of the final status issues should lead to the establishment of an independent and viable State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Pakistan has been a consistent supporter of the Palestinian cause for more than six decades. We support lasting peace for all in the Middle East. Israel should withdraw from all occupied lands, including those of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

Despite other important developments in the region, the Palestinian issue must retain its primacy. It should not be allowed to be eclipsed or sidelined. The Secretary-General has said that peace and Palestinian statehood are long overdue. To achieve those overriding objectives, the following steps ought to be taken with a high sense of urgency. First, the international community, led by the Quartet, should re-engage and refocus on the Palestinian issue. Secondly, direct and meaningful negotiations should resume. Thirdly, the cycle of violence should be stopped. Fourthly, efforts should be intensified to stem and address the grave humanitarian situations in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Fifthly, the Security Council may re-energize itself with a view to maintaining peace and security in that sensitive region. Such a path starts with monitoring the implementation of its own resolutions.

The crisis in Syria continues to be a matter of serious concern to the international community and the Council. An early, peaceful solution to the situation in Syria, with full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, is in the best interests of the people of Syria and of peace and stability in the region. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. The first priority is to bring about an immediate ceasefire and to create an environment amenable to promoting diplomatic efforts. We call on all sides in Syria and all external stakeholders to extend their full and genuine cooperation to the Special Representative. Violence should not spin out of control. Conflict should not expand. And, above all, diplomacy must prevail.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

I will first address the situation in Syria and its consequences for international peace and security, and then I will turn to the urgency of relaunching the peace process. First, on the subject of Syria, three months ago in this Chamber I denounced the victimization of 19,000 civilians in the Syrian crisis. Now the tragic death toll is over 30,000. Syria is descending into civil war, with the situation exacerbated daily by the Syrian regime's policy of systematically violating human rights and flouting their humanitarian obligations. Last week, the Syrian regime once again rejected the Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative's call for a unilateral ceasefire. On the contrary, the use of heavy weaponry by the regime has only increased since July, along with the systematic use of air assets and increased indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population in Aleppo and Homs and on the outskirts of Damascus. France reiterates that those responsible for the most serious crimes, in particular crimes against humanity, must be held accountable for their actions before the International Criminal Court.

The Syrian crisis threatens the security and stability of the region. The Council reiterated on 5 October that the Syrian authorities have an obligation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring States. We unreservedly condemn the Syrian military firing on Turkish territory and their incursions into and bombardments of Lebanese territory. The Council demanded at that time that the Syrian regime put an immediate end to its violations of international law. Likewise, in the Golan, the violations of the areas of limitation must come to an end.

In that context, we welcome the restraint shown by Syria's neighbouring countries and their generosity in receiving their Syrian brothers. France would like to express its solidarity with its ally Turkey. We also welcome the responsible attitude shown by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the entirety of the political class, who have shown their desire to preserve stability in Lebanon. We will not tolerate a return to political assassinations, which would undermine the stability there. We encourage all political actors in Lebanon to continue to invest in the process of national dialogue relaunched by President Sleiman.

Syria and the region must prioritize a political transition that reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people, in particular their demand to be led by a leader who does not have the blood of the people on his hands. France supports Mr. Brahimi's efforts to move towards that transition and calls on the other members of the Security Council to give the Joint Special Representative the tools he needs to succeed despite the intransigence of Damascus.

France is working to encourage that process. We support the opposition forces' efforts to unite and prepare for the transition. At the local level, the support that we provide to the civilian revolutionary councils, in particular the liberated areas, will enable those councils to lay the foundation for local civilian governance and to respond to the daily needs of the civilian population. At the national level, the President of France made a commitment before the General Assembly to recognize a provisional Government that is representative of the new Syria as soon as it is formed. He also recalled that that process will require that guarantees to be made to the

various Syrian communities so that their security can be ensured.

There is also an urgent need for an international humanitarian response that is up to the task of meeting the needs of those suffering in Syria and that can match the generosity of Syria's neighbouring countries. International donors should mobilize to extend the funds called for by the United Nations, as winter threatens the most vulnerable civilians. Full access to all humanitarian actors must be agreed to by the Syrian authorities. It is particularly intolerable that medical infrastructure and personnel have been targeted and that the wounded are denied access to care because they are from combat zones.

I would now like to mention the Middle East peace process. The tragic situation in Syria should not cause us to forget the current impasse in the peace process. A year after the Quartet reiterated the basis for a process that should produce, by the end of 2012, a final agreement and the creation of a Palestinian State, side by side with Israel, we are further than ever from that goal. Two months from the deadline, it is the two-State solution itself that is threatened. Continued settlement policies by Israel in violation of international law weaken every day the physical viability of a future Palestinian State that is contiguous. They also threaten the political viability of such an entity. Each new settlement makes it more difficult to establish the climate of trust that is necessary for the return to dialogue. They also threaten its economic viability, as the structural restraints on the Palestinian economy, in particular in Area C, are the result of the settlement policy.

In that context, the Palestinian Authority finds itself threatened both financially and politically. The reforms that have prepared the way for a functioning State in Palestine are being undermined by an unprecedented financial crisis. Europe alone has maintained its financial support for the Palestinian Authority. France has just provided €10 million in additional budgetary support, but we cannot shoulder alone the responsibilities of the international community. While the recent facilitations agreed to by Israel, in particular regarding tax collection, are welcome, they do not reflect the structural needs of the Palestinian Authority.

Undermining those who advocate peace, as we find happening today, opens the door to those who advocate violence. We condemn without reservation the indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, but we also condemn the violence committed by the settlers against the Palestinian people and the holy sites on an ongoing basis.

It has taken this long for all of the actors to recognize the two-State solution. The international community cannot remain indifferent to the ongoing undermining of that process on the ground. We must act, but how? The solution is well known, but it must be implemented. We must first define, based on United Nations resolutions and previous negotiations, a framework of parameters that allows for credible negotiations between the parties. Europe has already made its contribution in that regard. On that basis, the parties should be brought to make the necessary compromises with the needed support of the international community.

We must react, but when? We cannot wait any longer. The situation I have outlined does not allow us to. It also requires a clear timetable along with those parameters.

Who should react? The Quartet has failed. We must revisit the use of the Security Council, which remains the natural forum for bringing together the efforts of the international community that are necessary, given the scope of the task.

To conclude, I should like to return to the words of President Abbas to the General Assembly. This is perhaps our last chance, he said. Yes, it is perhaps our last chance to implement the two-State solution. It is perhaps also our last chance to change the bloody trajectory on which the Syrian authorities are dragging their people and the region. In both cases, it would be irresponsible to not seize this last opportunity, and the Council should contribute to those efforts.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing on the developments in the Middle East, including Palestine. I am also pleased to welcome my colleague and friend, Ambassador Masood Khan, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan, to the Council and to wish him every success.

While the world is attentively following the changes in the Arab region, which is at a crucial stage that is paving the way for the construction of democratic societies in which citizens will enjoy decent lives and freedom, the peace process in the Middle East is in an unprecedented and dangerous stalemate. That constitutes a serious threat and is of concern to us all.

In the midst of those changes and events, the Palestinian territories are still being subjected to intensive and expanded settlement activities designed to destroy the geographical unity of the West Bank and annex additional land, which will undermine the two-State vision. Al-Quds continues to be the target of numerous practices and procedures aimed at diluting its Arab identity and preventing it from being a city of tolerance and coexistence among religions and peoples.

We followed with concern the recurrent attacks against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, by settlers under the protection of the Israeli police, who attacked unnamed worshipers who were defending the mosque against the attacks. The attacks against those holy sites constitute for all Muslims new and dangerous acts of provocation that could, in combination with the continuing and systematic attempts to Judaize occupied East Jerusalem and obliterate its spiritual and cultural character, give rise to a very volatile situation.

Israel's unceasing attempts to change the religious, cultural, demographic and architectural characteristics of the old city include the destruction of Bab al-Maghariba, the scaling up of archaeological excavations under and around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the desecration of holy sites. I would like here to recall the statement made by His Royal Highness the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee before the General Assembly:

"The Kingdom of Morocco looks forward to seeing the international community reconsider its methods of intervention and its *modus operandi* so as to halt the Judaization of Al-Quds Al-Sharif".

All peace initiatives and terms of reference, in particular the decisions and resolutions of the United Nations, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the Madrid principles, have acknowledged the legitimate right of the Palestinians to an independent State, within the borders of 4 June 1967, living side by side with Israel.

In response to international appeals, the Palestinian side has made many concessions to demonstrate its resolve to achieve peace through negotiations. However, those concessions have not sufficed to induce Israel to reciprocate with a view to ensuring the success of peace efforts. On the contrary, the flexibility of the Palestinian side has been met only with Israel's intransigence and its continuous blockade of Gaza, using all international and regional attempts to strengthen the occupation so as to make a final, internationally agreed resolution impossible.

The Kingdom of Morocco welcomes the fact that the Palestinian side has opted for negotiations and for achieving peace on the basis of international legitimacy and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We reiterate once again our support for the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to establish its independent State, with Al-Quds as its capital — a State that is recognized by the international community and contributes, along with other Member States, to the achievement of the goals of our Organization.

We commend the Palestinian side for its strong spirit of responsibility in continuing negotiations with interested international parties aimed at discussing the form of the Palestinian request that is to be submitted to the General Assembly to enable it to gain full membership in this international Organization.

The policy of blockade imposed by the occupying authorities on Gaza since 2006 has led to untold suffering, as witnessed by international governmental and non-governmental organizations. We would warn that an escalating humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions is developing in the Gaza Strip and that the Council and all influential and powerful States must work to ensure the lifting of that inhuman and unjust blockade. Despite the innumerable decisions, resolutions and stances taken by the Council, the Quartet and the General Assembly and its Committees, the Israeli occupation continues, as does the suffering of the Palestinian people and the inability of the international community to find a feasible solution that is achievable, ready and documented.

We are not alone in our conviction that there is not much time left before the two-State solution becomes inapplicable or impossible, given Israeli policies on the ground. It is necessary, in the coming few months, to accelerate the revitalization of the peace process, bring pressure to bear on Israel to cease its settlement activities, remove all obstacles and end all practices that stand in the way of negotiations, contribute to helping the Palestinians achieve a viable and independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and ensuring the restoration of the Lebanese and Syrian territory.

Failure to resolve the question of Palestine will fuel prolong the Arab-Israeli conflict and fuel tension and violence in the region, which is witnessing a crisis to which Syrians of all constituencies have fallen victim in the past two years; neighbouring States are suffering as well. We look to the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, to convince the parties in Syria to stop the violence, even temporarily, with a view to creating circumstances conducive to ending the infighting and the indiscriminate destruction of homes and places of worship and to pave the way for inclusive and comprehensive political dialogue, with a view to ensuring the State's independence, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and building a democratic society that respects all the rights and freedoms of the Syrian people.

Future generations, and history, will not judge us on the basis of rhetoric or even good-faith efforts, but, rather, on the basis of actions that reflect a genuine desire to conduct constructive negotiations and take courageous decisions, particularly in terms of putting an end to settlement activities and occupation by Israel, with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace.

We sincerely hope that the coming weeks will bring a glimmer of hope for the Palestinians that their tragedy is coming to an end and that they are on the road to peace, which will enable them to realize their dream — and ours — of achieving a safe, cooperative and peaceful Middle East.

Mr. Parham (United Kingdom): Many thanks to Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing, and I join others in welcoming the new Permanent Representative of Pakistan.

The bloodshed in Syria has now entered its twentieth month. The facts and figures cited by other Council members on the human cost of the conflict have sadly become all too familiar. In July, we again warned about the consequences of continued inaction by the Council (see S/PV.6816). We said that if the Council did not act, there would be further violence and bloodshed and that the deteriorating situation would spill over the borders, drawing in the region and clearly posing a threat to international peace and security.

That, of course, is exactly what we are now seeing. In particular among recent developments, we strongly condemn the Syrian shelling across the border into Turkey. The Security Council press statement of 4 October responding to that outrage (SC/10783) was welcome, but that alone, of course, has not stopped the activity, and is unlikely to stop the regime from pursuing its murderous path.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian impact of the conflict. As winter approaches, there is an urgent need for suitable shelter, fuel and warm blankets. We, the United Kingdom, are doing what we can to address that. The United Kingdom is the second largest bilateral donor to the international humanitarian response, to date providing \$60 million for food, medical care, shelter and other essential support to the tens of thousands of people affected by the fighting in Syria and the refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. I echo Under-Secretary-General Feltman's appeal to Member States to contribute to the humanitarian assistance.

However, the overwhelming priority remains an end to the violence and full and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies so that civilians can escape the fighting and aid can get through to save lives in the worst affected areas. United Kingdom aid is making a difference and is helping to save lives, but we should be under no illusion about the difficulties involved in delivering such assistance. Civilians have been targeted and killed. Medical workers have been attacked and blocked from helping those in need.

There is evidence of atrocities committed by both the Government and the opposition in violation of international law but, as the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic makes clear in its report (A/HRC/19/69), the greater responsibility clearly lies with the regime. We urge all parties to comply with their obligations and to protect civilians from the scourge of conflict.

We should of course continue to work to assist those affected by the conflict. However, the Council has a moral imperative to work to address the causes of the conflict. We are all fully committed to supporting the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his work towards a political settlement and a political transition.

As the Council, we have achieved a great deal over the past year on issues concerning Somalia, Yemen and the Sudan and South Sudan but, in each case, the Council was united in making clear that there would be serious consequences if one or other of the parties failed to meet its commitments. We need to apply that lesson to Syria. The brutal regime has been impervious to the repeated efforts of international actors, including some around this table, to persuade it to follow the route of dialogue. It has ignored its obligations to cease violence under the six-point plan pursuant to resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012). Instead, the violence has escalated. The Council needs to apply the firm and consistent pressure that has so far been lacking.

In the meantime, it is notable that, in August, the General Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favour of a resolution that deplored the Security Council's failure to agree on measures to ensure the compliance of the Syrian authorities with its decisions. Resolution 66/253 B called on all Syrian parties to rapidly implement the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and encouraged Member States to support that implementation.

As our Foreign Secretary, William Hague, has said in a statement today, it is utterly unacceptable that the regime continues to attack its own people with brutality and without remorse. No country should shut its eyes to the horrors that we are witnessing. History and the Syrian people will judge it harshly if it does.

Grave as the situation in Syria is, we must not lose our focus on the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whose resolution remains central to the stability of the region. The frequency with which that issue was raised during the general debate of the General Assembly last month underlined its continued importance. Our shared goal remains a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, a fair solution for refugees and security arrangements that respect Palestinian sovereignty and protect Israeli security and Jerusalem as a joint capital.

A negotiated end to the occupation remains the best way to allow Palestinian aspirations to be met in reality and on the ground. A demonstration of political will and leadership is needed from both sides to break the current impasse. We have urged both sides to focus on dialogue, to avoid steps that could undermine the prospects for peace and to work towards the resumption of direct negotiations.

Israeli settlement activity remains the most serious threat to the two-State solution. Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the very viability of a two-State solution. Any step that entrenches the presence of settlements in the West Bank risks sending the message that Israel is not serious in its support for a two-State solution. Like others, we also remain very concerned about the increasing number of incidents of settler violence and the fact that many such incidents appear to go unpunished.

As Under-Secretary-General Feltman reported, last month the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee on Assistance to the Palestinians highlighted the Palestinian Authority's continued State-building efforts. However, it also focused on the severe fiscal crisis that the Palestinian Authority is now facing. The Palestinian Authority will continue to face regular and increasingly profound crises unless its finances are put on a more sustainable footing in the medium term. External factors severely constrain the Palestinian Authority's ability to help the private sector to develop, to promote Palestinian livelihoods and to address the fiscal gap.

The United Kingdom will continue to be one of the principle supporters of Palestinian State-building efforts, assisting it to tackle poverty, build institutions and boost its economy. However, a shift in the freedom of movement of goods and of people and in the framework for doing business across the Palestinian territories is also urgently needed.

With our European partners, we call upon Israel to halt the demolition of Palestinian housing and infrastructure in Area C of the West Bank and the subsequent forced transfer of the population, as well as to address humanitarian needs. We encourage Israel to accelerate the approval of Palestinian master plans and to simplify administrative procedures to obtain building permits for Area C. Without Palestinian control over that land, including planning, building and security, the viability of a future Palestinian State, and thus the two-State solution, is reduced.

We also remain concerned about the situation in Gaza and continue to press the Israeli Government to ease restrictions on movement and access. We will never underestimate Israel's security needs but, for any sustainable peace deal, there must be an economically viable Gaza.

Rocket attacks from Gaza must also stop. We continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint and to prevent civilian casualties and loss of life. The escalation of violence earlier this month only served to entrench the status quo.

The developments in the wider region underscore the importance of achieving a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict that gives the Israeli people peace and security and the Palestinian people the State that they need and deserve. We will continue to urge both sides to show the political leadership and courage required to make progress towards that shared goal of a two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity. I will limit my remarks to two things. First, I thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing. Secondly, I would like to announce that I have requested the Secretariat to distribute the text of my statement in order to save some time. It is past 1 p.m. That is my small contribution to gaining a little bit of time.

I shall now give the floor to four delegations under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed variation when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Allow me, at the outset, to reiterate to the Council that my Government remains committed to the letter of resolution 1701 (2006) and looks forward to its implementation in its entirety. In that context, I would also like to say that all Lebanese parties, whether in the Government or the opposition, would like the Council to exercise its leadership in urging Israel to abide by its obligations under that resolution, that is, to bring a complete halt to its violations of Lebanese sovereignty, whether on land, sea or air, and to withdraw forthwith from any Lebanese territory that it continues to occupy.

For almost two years now, hundreds of thousands of young men and women across the entire Arab world have been taking to the streets, seeking freedom, dignity and good governance. That has laid waste to the idea of Arab exceptionalism, a pseudo theory advanced by some pundits to explain the so-called Arab resistance to democratization, whether based on the racist cliché that democracy is incompatible with Islam or inimical to Arab culture, or on the erroneous prejudice that Arabs are not yet ready for democracy or hold democratic values in lower esteem than other people. That pseudo theory of Arab exceptionalism has been swept away by the winds of change that have been blowing in our region.

Unfortunately, some other forms of exceptionalism continue to survive in our part of the world. While the day after tomorrow the Security Council will be holding an open debate on strengthening the rule of law in the maintenance of peace and security, it is important to keep in mind that one country in our region continues to challenge, with unquestioned impunity, the principles and norms of international law, and to ignore all resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Council on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine.

As it happens, that exceptionalism is best illustrated by the fact that Israel has failed to withdraw from the Palestinian territories it occupied in 1967, as per its legal obligations under resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It also continues to build settlements in the occupied territories, in violation of international law, international humanitarian law, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). Indeed, Israel's annexation of Jerusalem, its extension of the wall close to the Golan Heights and the erection of the wall itself also constitute similar violations. Similarly, the punitive blockade to which Gaza has been subjected represents collective punishment in a form that violates articles 33 and 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which govern the conduct of an occupying Power in relation to a civilian population living under occupation.

Moreover, since 1967, Israel, as an occupying Power, has constantly and systematically violated its basic duties under international humanitarian law. Such violations have included the transfer of populations, the annexation of land, collective punishment, the punitive demolition of houses, the use of torture and political assassinations. In addition, Israel has been charged with grave violations of human rights and with a number of war crimes in its conduct of military operations in the occupied territories. Nonetheless, it continues to behave as if it were above the law.

Has the time not come to put an end to such exceptionalism and to hold Israel accountable for its international obligations? That is not a rhetorical question. Let me then repeat, has the time not come to put an end to such exceptionalism and to hold Israel accountable for its international obligations?

On 29 October, the Council will hold another open debate on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. The Security Council is to be commended for having adopted a landmark resolution — resolution 1265 (1999) — by which it expresses its willingness to respond to situations of armed conflict where civilians are being targeted or humanitarian assistance to civilians is being deliberately obstructed. Since that time, the Council has begun to mainstream an approach based on the protection of civilians into its work, and has enhanced the role of its peacekeeping operations to that effect in various country-specific situations. They include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Haiti, Libya, Liberia and the Sudan.

But when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, exceptionalism is king. The Security Council has dramatically failed to respond in any tangible manner to the offences it has voted to address, namely, the targeting of civilians in armed conflict, particularly Palestinian women and children, and the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance, let alone even considering sanctions against the perpetrator — Israel, the occupying Power. Need I recall here that resolution 1325 (2000) called on all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, especially as civilians? And yet, when it comes to Palestinian women, the Council exhibits paralysis, and is unable to take any concrete action to redress their dire situation.

Palestinian women are particularly vulnerable to the immediate effects of the Israeli occupation. The fact is that roadblocks, patrols, curfews, checkpoints and the construction of the wall all have a negative impact on the health, education and economic security of Palestinians in general, and women in particular. The restriction of movement created by such repressive measures has seriously impeded their access to health care, for example. People living in villages around East Jerusalem need so-called permits to enable them to reach hospitals. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem documents how such requirements are particularly problematic for pregnant women, who need to get to hospital in time to give birth, and how women have had to give birth at checkpoints because of the Israeli permit regime, leading to numerous infant deaths in the process.

Furthermore, according to a UN-Women publication entitled *Suspended Lives: Palestinian Female Prisoners in Israeli Prisons*, an estimated 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and/or detained under Israeli military orders since 1967. According to the Public Committee against Torture in Israel, the interrogation methods used by Israeli agents include

“beating; slapping; kicking; stepping on shackles; bending the interrogee and placing her in other painful positions; intentional tightening of shackles; violent shaking; sleep deprivation; prolonged shackling behind the back; cursing, humiliating and threatening the detainee; depriving the detainee of essential needs; exposing her to extreme heat or cold; isolation and secrecy; and imprisonment under inhumane conditions”.

The Security Council is clearly failing to live up to its responsibility to sustain the relevant legal provisions applicable to the situation of Palestinian women; hence the survival of yet another form of Israeli exceptionalism. Unfortunately, the same can be said about the protection of children's rights. Need I further remind members that this Council has recognized the paramount importance of the protection of children in armed conflict, namely through its adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), followed by resolution 1612 (2005), in which the Security Council established a monitoring and reporting mechanism for grave violations committed against innocent girls and boys? But Palestinian children have been deprived of that elaborate protection system.

According to a recent UNICEF bulletin, of the total amount of killings and injuries perpetrated against Palestinian children, 84 per cent have been at the hands of the Israeli security forces. That bulletin addresses the illegal detention of children who are subjected to acts “tantamount to torture by the Israeli army and police” and who experienced being “hand-tied, blindfolded, strip searched, verbally abused, subjected to physical violence”. In that regard as well, the Council is failing to live up to its responsibility to sustain the relevant provisions applicable to the situation of Palestinian children; hence the survival of yet another form of Israeli exceptionalism. In that context, advocating that international and humanitarian law has not applied to Palestine since it is not a State only adds insult to injury.

The time for ending all forms of Israeli exceptionalism is long overdue. The time for recognizing the State of Palestine and granting it full membership of our Organization is long overdue as well. An interim step in that direction would be to secure non-member State observer status for Palestine during this General Assembly session.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes. I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Arab Group, I would like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing today. The delegation of Egypt, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, would like to add its voice to the statements to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Since the two statements will reflect the fundamentals of the Arab position with regard to the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, I shall briefly underline six points to be raised by the Group of Arab States.

First, the Group of Arab States deplores the ongoing Israeli violations against the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the blockade and recurrent aerial bombardments of Gaza, the most recent of which took place yesterday. We also deplore the extrajudicial killings and note with concern the Israeli settlers' violence, which has reached unprecedented levels, and the desecration with impunity of Christian and Muslim shrines in the occupied territories, including written phrases inciting hatred of Jesus and opposing churches in the occupied lands, in addition to the storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem this month by settlers and Israeli security forces. All of that deserves special attention. Undoubtedly, the recent Israeli threats to launch a full military land operation against Gaza are additional reminders of the intentions of the occupying Power. The Arab Group calls for the Security Council to take urgent measures before the situation deteriorates irretrievably.

Secondly, peace efforts in the region are passing through one of the most difficult stages in years. That is due to the absence of any clear political horizon for the two-State solution. It is also due to the deliberate manipulative procrastination of the Israeli Government, which always uses insubstantial pretexts, such as the forthcoming elections and the expected change in Government, to avoid compliance with United Nations resolutions, despite the fact that Security Council resolutions and peace treaties are international obligations. This is despite the fact that Security Council resolutions, as well as the provisions of the peace treaties, are internationally binding, irrespective of Government changes or the holding of elections. The Middle East peace process has become a rote process dragging on for more than two decades without any real achievement towards its main goal, which is peace.

Thirdly, the failure of the Quartet to meet at the ministerial level during the high-level segment of the General Assembly or even to issue a statement expressing its position requires a re-evaluation by the international community of the role of the Quartet and whether it should remain the key international player in the Middle East peace process or the question of Palestine.

Fourthly, Israel continues to claim that it is willing to consider incremental solutions that would block any final solution during the various phases of implementation. The international community has to set the parameters of the peace process on the basis of Security Council resolutions. The Group of Arab States calls upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities to address the question of Palestine in earnest. That question has always been the main source of instability in the Middle East, threatening international peace and security. The Arab Group therefore calls upon the Security Council to adopt a clear-cut resolution that indicates the parameters of the final solution.

Fifthly, the Group of Arab States expresses its full support for all the steps taken by the Palestinian leadership to achieve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. We call upon all Member States to recognize the State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967 and to support the Palestinian quest for full membership of the United Nations. We expect the General Assembly at least to adopt a resolution during its current session to upgrade the status of Palestine to that of a non-member observer State, as a first step towards achieving full membership. Such a resolution would confirm in practice that the United Nations organs are applying the principles of justice without politicization or double standards.

Sixthly, the Group of Arab States reiterates the decisions taken by the Ministerial Council of the Arab League with regard to the Syrian crisis, including its recent decision of 5 September in Cairo. The Group condemns the ongoing killings of brotherly civilians in Syria over the past 18 months. Those responsible for the atrocities have to be brought to international justice and should be held accountable for their crimes.

On the other hand, the Group of Arab States stresses the importance of focusing on the main topic of the monthly briefings on the Middle East in the Security Council which is the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

The current situation in Syria should not be used as a pretext to turn a blind eye to the continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan.

The Arab Group requests that all monthly briefings to the Security Council by the Secretariat on the situation in the Middle East include a clear reference to the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan condemning Israel's continuous violation of resolution 497 (1981) and confirming the applicability of The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to the occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967. A similar reference should also reaffirm the illegality of Israel's annexation and settlement activities and the application of Israeli legislation in the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as reaffirm that Israel must fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of June 1967.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Ribeiro Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to reiterate Brazil's satisfaction at seeing Guatemala presiding over the work of the Security Council. (*spoke in English*)

In the interest of time, and heeding your appeal, Sir, I am going to read out a short version of my statement. The full text will be available in the Chamber.

Unfortunately, the situation in the region continues to deteriorate since the Council last discussed the Middle East in this open format, three months ago (see S/PV.6816).

We are witnesses, on a daily basis, to the unfolding crisis of the most serious consequences for the Syrian people. The losses and injuries of Turkish nationals added to the horrifying statistics of civilian casualties.

Brazil associates itself with the press statement by the Security Council and condemns in the strongest terms the shelling of the town of Akçakale. We also express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and the Government of Turkey. As the dangers of a regional spillover have become manifest, Brazil calls for restraint. The escalation of the conflict serves the interests of no one, in particular not those of innocent civilians on both sides of the border.

Our sympathy and solidarity now also go to those who have been victimized by heinous terrorist attacks in Aleppo. As stated by the Council, such acts are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomever committed.

Although the situation in Syria continues to defy the best efforts of engaged actors, there is no alternative but to deepen and strengthen diplomatic efforts towards a political solution. We all know there is no military solution to the conflict.

As stated by President Dilma Rousseff in the general debate (see A/67/PV.6), diplomacy and dialogue are not just our best option, they are the only option. We reiterate our condemnation of all violence and our firm call on the parties to lay down their weapons and engage in the mediation efforts being undertaken by the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, who must be supported not only in words but also — especially — in deeds.

We reaffirm our support for the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and reiterate that the largest share of the responsibility for the violence we have seen so far lies with the Syrian Government.

As we call for an immediate ceasefire and a cessation of all violence, we recall the primary responsibility of the Syrian authorities in committing to the process. Armed opposition groups, especially those that increasingly rely on foreign military and logistical support, have only added to the scope of the Syrian tragedy.

Our serious concerns regarding Syria do not allow us to overlook the increasingly worrisome situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The peace process remains at a dangerous stalemate.

Despite overwhelming international condemnation, unabated Israeli settlement of the territories, including East Jerusalem, is turning the prospect of a two-State solution into an ever more elusive goal, in contravention of consensus decisions by the Council.

The serious financial constraints now facing the Palestinian Authority not only pose further threats to stability but also reveal the clear limits of social, economic and institutional development under Israeli occupation.

Violence from elements in the Palestinian side must also be rejected. Peace and a future of stability and prosperity will not be served by shelling and other acts of that kind. Negotiations are the way forward and the only way to ensure that the conflict, which has lasted for much too long, will be overcome.

This body must not abdicate its primary responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. We reiterate our call on the Quartet, which, unfortunately, has become inoperative, to establish regular reporting procedures to the Council on its activities. Peace in the Middle East concerns the whole of the United Nations and cannot be outsourced.

Brazil is convinced that only a free and sovereign Palestine will be able to meet Israel's legitimate security needs and fulfil our collective goals of peace and political stability in the region. In that context, we reiterate our support for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. As an interim step, we will be certain to extend our support to upgrading the Palestinian status to that of an observer State.

As I address the Council, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations is paying a visit to the region. He was in Israel on Saturday and Sunday and is currently in Palestine. The message he conveys, as the leading diplomat of a country where Jews and Arabs, Syrians and Lebanese live together in harmony, is a message of peace, based on respect for international law, through dialogue and diplomacy.

Allow me some brief words on Lebanon. Brazil commends the Lebanese Government and the political leadership for their efforts to maintain stability in the country despite regional turmoil.

Lebanon deserves our active support and encouragement. In that regard, Brazil reaffirms its intention to continue to participate in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon Maritime Task Force.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to welcome to the Council the representative of Pakistan, who has just been appointed as an Ambassador to the United Nations. I would also like to associate myself with the statement to be made by the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who will speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

More than 60 years have passed since Israel occupied the Palestinian territories. That occupation has caused more than 5 million Palestinian refugees, who were chased from their land and had their houses and property stolen from them. There are those who want to control their present and their future. As I said, there have been more than six decades of systematic settlement activities and grave violations committed by Israel on a huge scale, including violations of the human rights of those who are living and those who have passed away. Violations of our land, of international humanitarian law and of every existing international legal standard and code of ethical conduct have been carried out in the occupied Arab territories.

For more than six decades, the Palestinian people have awaited the opportunity to exercise their most basic right, namely, the establishment of a free, independent sovereign State on the land of their ancestors.

For more than six decades, Israel has defied international legitimacy, arrogantly carrying out its aggressive policies in order to impede any opportunity for achieving peace in the region. That situation has continued due to the direct assistance provided to it by a number of powerful countries that can be found here in the Council, as well as others, of course, outside of the Council.

Despite all of that, some are still in an inquiring mode, posing naive questions to the international community in an attempt to determine the parameters of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian issue. Their naivety is quite similar to the attempts during the Middle Ages to determine the gender of angels.

My questions for the Council, therefore, are the following. How many more decades will Arab lands have to spend under Israeli occupation until some States finally admit that there is a need for serious action to end that reprehensible occupation? How many more innocent Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and other victims will have to die before those States finally become convinced that this genuine tragedy must come to an end? How many more settlements in occupied Arab lands will have to be built? How many separation apartheid walls will have to be erected in our occupied lands? And how many Islamic and Christian holy sites will have to be desecrated before those same States finally wake up and put an end to Israel's crimes? Were all the reports submitted after dozens of investigative committees, fact-finding missions and panels of wise men to the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the specialized agencies of the United Nations during the decades-long Israeli occupation not enough to make the world aware of the scale of the aggression and terror wrought by Israel upon the States and peoples of the region? More than 1,000 resolutions have been adopted by the Organization and its specialized agencies calling for an end to Israel's occupation and condemning its serious and systematic violations of human rights. Was all that not sufficient to make those States feel some unease about their provision of unlimited military, economic and political support or to make them put an end to their illegal assistance to Israel, enabling it to continue its crimes against the occupied Arab lands? All of those questions are levelled at those States that back Israel and claim night and day that they wish to see international law implemented

and that they wish to fight against terrorism and maintain the credibility of the United Nations and the inviolability of human rights.

During the meeting this morning, we have heard a number of representatives of States backing Israel, explaining to us their countries' position concerning human rights laws, international law and peace in our region. Some of them did so to such an extent that they simply seemed to forget the agenda item that we are discussing here today.

The very bitter truth is that part of our land in the Syrian Golan, which we hold dear to our hearts, has been under occupation for 45 years now, despite the fact that the Security Council adopted by majority vote resolution 497 (1981), declaring Israel's annexation of the Syrian Golan, occupied in 1967, to be null and void and without legal basis. The Security Council must live up to its responsibility, embrace reality in a serious way and implement resolution 497 (1981) and other relevant resolutions it has adopted. We say that because not to do so and to have failed to do so for decades simply confirms the existence of selective and exceptional interpretations among some members of the Council when it comes to the implementation of resolutions concerning Israel.

The representatives of the Secretariat are first and foremost tasked with discharging their mandates by informing the Council in a regular, updated, transparent and fair way of violations committed by the occupying Power, Israel, in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. We systematically provide information on such violations to the Secretary-General, most recently when we presented information to him on the kidnapping of Syrian citizens from the Syrian side of the ceasefire line. In addition to that, Israel has conducted large-scale aggressive and offensive military manoeuvres in the Syrian Golan, similar to those that have taken place against Syria before.

The Council has just heard a clear threat by the representative of Israel that his country was preparing actively for war in the region. Those who claim hypocritically that they are concerned about the rights of the Syrian people during these difficult times cannot simply ignore that the Syrian people have a right to recover their occupied lands. They cannot pass over in silence the tragedy or the suffering of Syrians under the Israeli occupation of the Golan. Those who claim that they want to protect the Syrian people cannot pass over in silence the ongoing construction of settlements in the Syrian Golan or the erection of an apartheid wall to the east of the occupied city of Majdal Shams.

Israel's refusal to make maps of minefields available to international organizations is inexcusable because cluster munitions and mines that were laid by Israel in the Golan have claimed 726 Syrian lives, including those of 227 children. The last such death took place on 4 October, when two Syrian children, both under the age of 10, died as a result of injuries resulting from the explosion of a disused Israeli land mine in the Syrian Golan.

It is quite astonishing to see those who seek security and stability in the region simply disregard Israel's threat to regional and international peace and security by fanning the flames of war against countries of the region and its unbridled attempts to involve its allies in that war. How can some States simply remain silent in the light of Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons and its decision to remain outside the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons?

Aware that Israel continues to refuse to participate in the international conference to be held next month to rid the Middle East of all types of weapons of mass destruction, we remind the Council that Syria continues to back the creation of such a nuclear-weapon-free zone. That support is a reflection of my country's initiative in 2003 — when we were members of the Security Council — to free the region of all types of weapons of mass destruction, first and foremost nuclear weapons. As the Council knows, those who prevented that initiative from succeeding are the very same countries that today refer with such hypocrisy to the dangers of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Finally, I am forced again to warn against the frenzied attempts of some delegations that back the continuation of Israeli occupation of Arab lands to weaken the well-known historic references of the agenda item on the Middle East by introducing other topics into the debate in order to move Security Council deliberations away from the main objective for which the item was created, namely, to put an end to Israeli occupation of Arab land, pursuant to Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). Based on that, I am not going to respond to the false claims and allegations levelled at my country by some delegations during this meeting. I am not going to respond to the undiplomatic language used, which is not appropriate to use in this forum.

We must put an end to the implementation of agendas that we have warned Arabs and non-Arabs against and ensure that the Council does not get bogged down in manoeuvres that will reduce to nought the very essence of the item under discussion. All of this would only serve the designs of Israel and those who protect it. We are aware that we have a great deal that we could say to refute those allegations, levelled by the same countries that have spared no effort to intensify the Syrian crisis and to thwart any peaceful resolution of it. In brazen violation of international law and of the Charter of the United Nations, and through the interference in Syrian domestic affairs, they have attempted to kidnap the rights of the Syrian people, to deprive them of their right to freely choose their future and their political system, and to put an end to all attempts at comprehensive national dialogue.

Flagrant foreign intervention in Syria's internal affairs prevents us from achieving national dialogue and reconciliation, which would enable us to build a Syria by all Syrians for all Syrians. Furthermore, the same countries undermine my country's sovereignty by encouraging terrorism and by supplying and providing all types of logistical, financial and political support to armed groups in Syria by providing them with arms and by recruiting terrorists, foreign terrorists, and facilitating their transit to Syria.

The greatest paradox here is that the Security Council has faced the situation in Mali in an appropriate way — and we thank the Security Council for that. All Council members agreed to confront the terrorism and extremism that rage in northern Mali today. However, some members of the Council have decided to deal with the same kind of terrorism — I am referring to that in Mali — in a very different way from that in my country, **The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): There are still a Syria, which is introduced through neighbouring number of speakers on my list for this meeting. I intend, countries. That is a policy of double standards. I urge with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to the members of the Council to ponder that. suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.55 p.m.

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