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### **AS SYRIA TRAGEDY DETERIORATES, PROGRESS IN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS**

#### **CENTRAL TO ENSURING REGION NOT FURTHER DESTABILIZED, SECURITY COUNCIL TOLD**

##### **Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman Briefs; Also Hears from Israel, Palestine, Some 44 Speakers in Day-long Debate**

As the “grim” tragedy inside Syria continued to deteriorate, it was even more vital that all parties worked collectively to preserve stability in the Middle East, Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told the Security Council today, stressing that advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was central to ensuring the region did not risk further destabilization.

“There is now an opening to develop a meaningful initiative to achieve the negotiated two-State solution that will best serve the interests, rights and aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians,” he said, briefing the 15-member body on recent developments. A critical point was approaching for the viability of the peace process. “Whether that prospect solidifies or vanishes will depend on the direction that leaders on both sides chose to take,” he said, as well as on the level of regional and international support for new efforts.

The choice ultimately rested with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to offer their peoples real prospects for peace and security, he said. The United Nations stood ready to assist in a return to meaningful negotiations through the Middle East Quartet and broader engagement with all partners. “We believe that this is a moment of opportunity that cannot afford to be lost,” he asserted.

Outlining recent developments, he said the Secretary-General had met with United States President Barak Obama on 11 April, agreeing there was a window of opportunity to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table and reconfirming the United Nations commitment to support a substantive initiative — with a defined political horizon — to achieve a two-State solution.

Much depended on whether the parties would show the bold leadership needed to create the conditions conducive for resuming a political process, he said, despite the considerable differences between them and the risk that events on the ground could overtake new efforts. In one encouraging sign, Israel and Palestine had agreed on 23 April to allow an experts mission to visit the Old City of Jerusalem in mid-May.

At the same time, he said the financial viability of the Palestinian Authority was still at risk, with its 2013 budget showing an increased dependence on external aid to cover short-term expenses. Total spending would hit \$3.8 billion, more than half of which was for wages. In addition, there had been a “considerable” increase in Palestinian casualties, mostly due to clashes with Israeli Security Forces during Palestinian protests that had grown violent. He welcomed that Samer Issawi had reportedly suspended his hunger strike following a 23 April court ruling allowing him to be freed after serving another eight months.

In addition, he was deeply troubled by continued settlement activity, reiterating the United Nations’ unequivocal position that it violated international law and undermined Palestinians’ confidence in the viability of the two-State solution. The Secretary-General was worried about reports that Israel had predicted the construction — within a year and a half — of housing units in the E1 area of the West Bank. In Gaza, the situation had grown more fragile. The calm following the 21 November 2012 ceasefire had been challenged, with scant progress made on the underlying issues that formed part of that understanding.

As for Palestinian reconciliation, he said Hamas and Fatah had resumed informal meetings, but had not advanced in their discussions. On 12 April, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission submitted an updated voter register to the Palestinian President, informing him the Commission was ready to organize an election. Voter registration now included more than 1.8 million electors in the West Bank and Gaza, representing more than 80 per cent of Palestinian adults.

On Syria, he said Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, had called for the Council to consider an arms embargo. The spillover from the Syrian conflict was being felt in Lebanon, where, on 21 April, at least seven rockets from the Syrian side had fallen on Lebanese soil. President Michel Suleiman had designated Tamam Salam as the next Prime Minister on 6 April, following the resignation of Najib Mikati. He

echoed the call to ensure early agreement on the electoral law so that timely parliamentary elections could take place on a consensual basis.

Amid increased instability across the Middle East, quick, concerted action was needed to address the humanitarian situation — both inside and outside Syria. “Now is the time for the international community to work in a concerted manner and without delay,” he stressed.

Following his briefing, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was “precarious”, with ground conditions continuing to decline. Israel’s illegal policies harmed the very belief that peace could be achieved.

To succeed, the peace initiative must require Israel to halt settlement activities and accept that negotiations would begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. Palestinian political prisoners must be released and the blockade on Gaza lifted. For its part, the Council could no longer “remain on the sidelines, abdicating its responsibilities” to work for a lasting solution. He was committed to a two-State solution, but at its core was an obligation to fulfil Palestinians’ aspirations, including the right of return for refugees, and to self-determination.

Ron Prosor ( Israel) said that not a day had passed in 65 years during which Israelis had not yearned for peace. But peace would remain elusive until Israel’s neighbours recognized Israel as a Jewish State that was here to stay. The three pillars on which regional peace must stand included one on education for tolerance and coexistence. He asked how children in Gaza could be expected to learn tolerance when their leaders repressed them daily. The second involved a clear recognition that Israel was the State of the Jewish people. Finally, peace must be based on reassurances for the security and safety of the only Jewish State.

When the floor was open for debate, delegates said both sides would benefit from overcoming the impasse, resuming negotiations and establishing an action plan with precise goals.

The United States representative said President Obama’s trip to the Middle East had led to constructive talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. They had agreed to engage in new efforts, including the removal of barriers to commerce and the expansion of private sector investment in the West Bank. All parties must reinvigorate the pursuit of a two-State solution. Provocations that could jeopardize that path must be avoided.

Egypt’s representative called for an urgent review of the Middle East Quartet, as it had made no progress in four years. It could not even agree on whether to meet. He supported United States’ efforts to reinvigorate the peace process and welcomed the easing of fiscal constraints on Palestinians. Continued Israeli violations of calm in Gaza were worrying, as was its tightened embargo on the enclave.

The Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States said the peace process had been in a stalemate since the General Assembly had elevated Palestine to a non-member observer State. The League held Israel fully responsible for the delays, in part because of its continued settlement expansion.

Lebanon’s delegate added that Israel’s construction of the separation wall, land confiscation and control over water sources only exacerbated Palestinian difficulties.

The deteriorating situation in Syria also received attention today, with many delegates decrying the continued bloodshed, now in its second year, and calling for an end to the violence. They urged parties to forge a political solution that would lead to the establishment of a democratic country that respected the rule of law.

Syria’s delegate said he would not respond to allegations made about his country, but he noted that many countries were trying to provoke an intra-Islamic conflict in order to bury the Israel-Palestine conflict and the possibility of a two-State solution.

Also speaking today were the representatives of France, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Russian Federation, Australia, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Guatemala, Argentina, Togo, Republic of Korea, China, Rwanda, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Japan, United Arab Emirates, Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Ukraine, India, Cuba, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Norway, Venezuela, Malaysia, Iceland, Indonesia, South Africa, Botswana, Turkey, Qatar, Nicaragua, Bahrain and Ecuador.

A representative of the European Union also spoke, as did the Chairman on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. recessed at 1:25 p.m., reconvened at 3:10 p.m. and adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

## Background

Meeting to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, the Security Council was expected to hear a briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to be followed by an open debate.

## Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem — the State of Palestine — remained precarious, with conditions on the ground continuing to decline. While many spoke of an unsustainable status quo, he believed there was no status quo. In fact, “the situation has actually never stopped changing, and regrettably, not for the better.”

Israel pursued illegal policies “aimed at altering the demography, character and geographic nature of the Territory,” he said, which endangered “the viability and very possibility” of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Israeli policies were also harming the very belief that peace could be achieved. Increasing protests by Palestinians against the occupation were subject to “violent suppression” and Israeli settler “terror and havoc” against Palestinians and their land created a “highly toxic” combination requiring urgent remedy. Palestinian leaders and the international community widely supported the two-State solution, but the occupation worked against chances for “genuine peace, security and coexistence”.

He welcomed the recent visit by the United States President, which showed renewed commitment to a just peace, and helped to create an atmosphere conducive for progress. In line with Palestinians’ “commitment to finding a political path forward”, the leadership had engaged sincerely in follow-up meetings with the United States Secretary of State and with the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, including at the Arab Summit in Doha. Arab commitment to peace, as reaffirmed through the Arab Peace Initiative, was “unquestionable”, but intention was not enough to overcome serious obstacles posed by Israel which “repeatedly undermined and actually sabotaged” past efforts for peace.

Success in any forthcoming peace initiative required cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including around East Jerusalem. There was a global consensus about the illegality of the activity, and it was “entirely incompatible with ending occupation and making peace”. Israel’s leaders needed to accept the principle of withdrawal in line with relevant Security Council resolutions. Israel needed also to accept that negotiations would begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, and that only negotiation could be used to make adjustments between the two sides. Palestinian political prisoners needed to be released; as 168 of the 4,900 Palestinians in captivity were being held without charge or trial. In addition, there were 235 children and 1,200 people needing urgent medical attention being detained, he said. The deaths of Arafat Jaradat and Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in detention had contributed to rising

tensions over the issue. He saluted the hunger strike of Samer Issawi, who was protesting his re-arrest and detention without charge, and called on members of the Quartet to continue efforts to compel Israel to release Issawi. He reiterated his call for Israel to end the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which continued to "debilitate and disfigure Palestinian society", as highlighted recently by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

A full political solution was needed, not partial or temporary remedies, he said. The various problems faced in the occupied territories were actually symptoms of the larger problem: "the continuation of the conflict and the absence of a just solution". Political will was required to overcome the prevailing obstacles and to advance negotiations to resolve the core issues within a set timeframe. That could only be achieved if Israel was held accountable and was no longer absolved of its legal obligations. It was vital that the international community made "tangible efforts" to compel Israel to abide by the law because the current impasse was unsustainable and efforts to "manage" the conflict were unacceptable. He hoped that the United States Secretary of State succeeded in efforts to launch a credible peace process and stressed that such efforts needed to include the Security Council, which could not "passively remain on the sidelines, abdicating its responsibilities" to work for a lasting solution and the establishment of peace and security in the region. He added that he supported the Arab Ministerial delegation that would soon be visiting various capitals, "promoting a political horizon". He stressed his commitment to the two-State solution, but added that, at the core of that commitment was the obligation to preserve the dignity of the Palestinian people and to ensure justice for them. Fulfilment of their national aspirations and rights, including the right of return for refugees and the right to self-determination in the independent State of Palestine were essential to that.

On the internal Palestinian front, he said he would continue to strive to end political division, with active efforts aimed at reconciliation ongoing. He was grateful for international support for unity and looked forward to elections taking place soon "in continuation of the democratic path we have chosen". He wished to reassure the international community that the recent resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad would not affect efforts. He also expressed his "grave concern" about the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees had fled Syria, suffering a second displacement. The crisis underscored the need for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspect, as well as the urgency of a political solution to the conflict in Syria. He appealed to the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold its responsibilities in that regard.

RON PROSOR ( Israel ) said " Israel wants peace", noting that not a day had passed in 65 years during which Israelis had not yearned for peace. Jewish tradition teaches that the world was sustained on three pillars: truth, justice and peace. Today, he wanted to speak about the three pillars on which a lasting peace in the region must stand. Those pillars were the foundation and must remain standing in the shifting sands of the Middle East. The first pillar was education for tolerance and coexistence. Peace should be fostered in homes, taught in schools and nourished by leaders and woven into the very fabric of society. It did not take an urban planner to realize that the Palestinians were missing the blueprints to build a peaceful neighbourhood. From kindergarten rooms to the fields of summer camps, messages of intolerance filled Palestinian society. Palestinian Authority television included a children's programme featuring a young girl reciting a poem that called Jews "Allah's enemies, the sons of pigs".

How could children in Gaza be expected to learn tolerance when their own leaders repressed them daily? Hamas had banned co-education and arrested women for riding bicycles. The second pillar involved a clear recognition that Israel was the State of the Jewish people. " Israel is committed to two States for two peoples," he said, recalling that, in 1947, Israel had accepted the United Nations plan to create two States in the region — one Arab and one Jewish. But Arab leaders at that time had rejected the existence of a Jewish State.

Sixty-five years on, Palestinian leaders never spoke about "two States for two people". Last November, the Palestinian Authority had built a monument in Bethlehem depicting the boundaries of a Palestinian State that extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. " Israel was literally wiped off the map," he said, adding that President Abbas also publicly embraced Hamas. Hamas — and its extremist ideology — were the enemies of peace. There would be no peace until Israel's neighbours recognized Israel as a Jewish State that was here to stay. As for the third pillar, peace built on security, he said the situation in Gaza provided a valuable lesson about any future arrangement in the West Bank.

As rockets flew out of Gaza, new and more sophisticated weapons were flowing in, he said, noting that just this month, security forces detained a vessel off the southern coast of the Sinai peninsula carrying 60,000 rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, machine guns, hand grenades and ammunition. It was no secret that Iran was the primary supplier of such arms and greatest sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. Iran's Ayatollahs threatened to combine their extremist ideology with nuclear weapons. "Make no mistake — Iran's ambition for nuclear weapons is the single greatest threat to the Middle East and the entire world," he said. Last month, negotiations to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear programme ended with Iran's announcement of two projects to expand its uranium processing ability.

At the same time, Iran was providing guidance to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as he butchered the Syrian people, and even now, was sending Hizbullah fighters to Syria to execute bloody plans on the ground. In Lebanon, Hizbullah was building an army equipped with 50,000 missiles, more than many members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Last month, a court in Cyprus jailed a Hizbullah member for planning terrorist attacks against civilians. Yet, that was still not enough to allow some European Union members to call Hizbullah a terrorist group, despite the fact that it operated with impunity on European soil. Any peace agreement must be based on reassurances for the security and safety of the citizens of the only Jewish State.

While Israelis understood that peace came at a price, "we will not turn a blind eye in the face of the threats that surround us", he said. For all those who believed that the so-called Arab Spring would lead to the blossoming of a new Middle East, democracy had not taken root. Instead, there had been more violence. To establish peace, a structure must be built that could withstand the rough winds of change sweeping the region. The architecture of peace had never been clearer. It had never been more important to strengthen the pillars of tolerance, mutual recognition and security — as those were the blueprints that needed to be followed by Israelis and Palestinians and, indeed, all people in the region, "if we are to live in peace, security and prosperity".

SUSAN RICE ( United States ) saw a "rapid deterioration" in the already-devastating situation in Syria. Attacks by regime forces on their own people included the use of heavy weapons, aircraft and ballistic missiles and were "deplorable", she said. She was also outraged by a recent attack in Damascus which caused hundreds of deaths and showed the regime's "complete disregard" for the lives of its citizens. The Government should be fully accountable for its actions and free and unfettered access for the Commission of Inquiry, which had been called for by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, was needed. A recent surge in refugee numbers was of great concern and a clear sign of the deterioration of the situation. She applauded the generosity of countries hosting refugees, counting on Syria's neighbours to keep their borders open to those fleeing to find safety. She called on States to contribute to Syria appeals and to consider what more could be done, and praised Kuwait for fulfilling contributions to United Nations agencies and other organizations. The United States had donated \$409 million in humanitarian assistance and had sent enough wheat to feed a million people for four months.

She commended the Syrian opposition for its bold declaration of principles, which highlighted their will to reject extremism, to prevent the use and transfer of chemical weapons and to preserve State institutions. United States Secretary of State John Kerry had underscored his commitment to a political solution by announcing the doubling of non-lethal support to \$250 million to assist local opposition councils, to build capacity of civilian activists and to link activists with larger coordination councils. She supported a negotiated solution that was based on the Geneva communiqué, but urged the international community to consider "what more could be done" to facilitate an orderly end to the conflict. She said the dangers posed by the possible use of chemical weapons were "very real and concerning" and she urged President Assad's regime to transfer its full executive authority to the transitional authority. The Syrian people had clearly rejected extremist ideology of Al-Qaida, she said, while giving her support to the Secretary-General's efforts to investigate the possible use of chemical weapons. Having requested a United Nations investigation, Syria should give full and unfettered access to the investigation. She noted the threat posed to neighbours by the conflict, particularly Lebanon, as demonstrated in recent attacks across the border, and criticized the transfer of money, weapons and expertise to President Assad from Hizbullah and Iran. She congratulated the Lebanese President, Michel Suleiman, for his leadership and said the nomination of Tamman Salam was the first step towards forming a new government which needed to remain Lebanese led. She encouraged the country to stick to the framework and to hold parliamentary elections.

President Obama's trip to the Middle East had led to constructive talks with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership and underlined his commitment to bringing both

parties back to negotiations. The parties had agreed to engage in new efforts to facilitate economic development for Palestinians, including the removal of barriers to commerce and the expansion of private sector investment in the West Bank. That was no substitute for serious negotiations, but she hoped the measures would increase the chances for successful talks and expressed her full support for pushing the process forward. As President Obama had said in Jerusalem, despite the challenges, "peace is necessary, peace is just and peace is possible". She said the United States would continue to support the Palestinian people and their efforts to build a future State. The United States provided budget support to the Palestinian State and was the largest bilateral donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), donating \$113 million in the 2013 fiscal year. Support for a viable and independent Palestinian State would continue, and she looked to the Palestinian Authority to revitalize the Palestinian economy and to reform institutions to better serve the Palestinian people. She said all parties needed to reinvigorate the pursuit of a two-State solution and a comprehensive peace, while recognizing that serious challenges remained. Rockets launched from Gaza and Sinai at Israel undermined efforts, and tensions and provocations could escalate and damage efforts to achieve peace. She urged leaders to avoid such provocations that could impact negatively on negotiations and a solution.

GÉRARD ARAUD (France), recalling that a two-State solution was the only fair outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, supported United States efforts to resume the peace process, in hopes it would induce the parties to resume talks with a view to reaching a lasting settlement. A viable political environment would require the adoption of confidence-building measures to prove that a better future was possible. He was concerned about the tensions created over the issue of Palestinian prisoners and called on Israel to respect its international obligations vis-à-vis Palestinian detainees.

He said France attached crucial importance to the continued good practices to strengthen the credibility of the Palestinian State, urging that the development in Zone C be promoted. Ending demolitions and confiscations also was imperative, and France regretted that 60 such demolitions had occurred yesterday. Calling on Israel and Palestinian leaders to abide by their support for a two-State solution, he said settlements both violated international law and undermined peace. They must be prevented. On the issue of Palestinian unity, he called on regional actors to support reconciliation under President Abbas. Support must be consolidated for the parties that were now at a stalemate. He condemned rocket launches against Israel.

On the situation in Syria, he asked when the Council would take the necessary measures to end the suffering, including referring the matter to the International Criminal Court. The Council's message on the need to ensure humanitarian access had been insufficient. Donors must also fulfil their aid pledges. A political transition was required that responded to Syrians' need to determine their fate, based on the Geneva communiqué and the fact that presidential powers must be transferred to a transitional Government. That stage had not yet been reached, and the Syrian President disregarded the reality of the crisis. France continued to support the opposition. He called for international support for a political transition. He also welcomed Lebanon's disassociation policy. While Syria had violated Lebanon's sovereignty, he called on all Lebanese people to uphold the Baabda Declaration. The region was on the brink of disaster as a result of the Syrian crisis, and those regional consequences must not be ignored.

SYLVE LUCAS (Luxembourg) associated herself with the European Union and saw an opportunity to develop a serious political initiative and achieve a two-State solution in the Middle East peace process. She welcomed the visits of United States politicians which were "important milestones" for relaunching negotiations, and said both sides would benefit from overcoming the impasse, resuming negotiations and establishing an action plan with precise goals. Though both parties had shown their commitment, Israel needed to end settlements and respect and abide by agreements with the Palestinians, to show faith. She was "deeply concerned" by new and continued settlement activity and by the destruction of Palestinian property, as well as statements by Israeli Ministers calling for strengthening of settlement activity, including in the E1 area. No one in Palestine could believe in peace if roads were reserved for settlers, the separation wall continued to wrest lands from Palestinians and illegal detentions continued. Palestinians also needed to fulfil their commitments to combat terrorism, she said, condemning the firing of rockets at civilians, which were "simply unacceptable". She greatly regretted the resignation of the Palestinian Prime Minister and was grateful for his service to the people during a very difficult time, especially in building strong institutions.

Words were "insufficient to describe the horror" faced by civilians in Syria, she said, listing torture, sexual violence, the use of children as combatants and the use of ballistic missiles as examples of crimes carried out. She was alarmed by the possible use of chemical weapons and said investigation teams were needed with full access in order to shed light on all credible allegations of their use. The list of crimes "continued to lengthen" and could not go unpunished. In the absence of a process for holding criminals responsible nationally, the International Criminal Court needed to come into play. Lakhdar Brahimi and Valerie Amos were right in saying that Syria was approaching "a point of no return", and urgent action was needed by the Security Council. One step had been taken in the previous week when it urged the lifting of obstacles to humanitarian assistance. The work of the United Nations should not be impeded and humanitarian convoys should not be subject to attacks. The Council had also urged an end to all armed violence and the need for a political transition in line with the Geneva communiqué. Now it was necessary to move forward from there and for the Security Council to put aside its differences and meet its obligations.

She said the Syrian National Coalition was a "legitimate interlocutor" and she encouraged inclusivity and the union of all Syrian society around the vision of a credible transition. It was clear that President Assad "could not prevail on the battlefield and could not claim to represent the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people". Syria's neighbours faced threats because of the conflict, she continued, with Lebanon and Jordan facing "existential threats". She welcomed the solidarity Syria's neighbours had shown with refugees and stressed it was important to give substance to the pronouncements of the Kuwait City Conference. Luxembourg had transferred funds promised to United Nations funds and agencies and had increased its contribution recently. She urged an end to cross-border rocket fire against Lebanon and full respect for its sovereignty and that of others. She praised the work of Lebanese President, Michel Suleiman, and said more work was needed to prevent the spread of the conflict.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) said the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was central to the wider region, welcoming efforts by the United States Secretary of State, as well as the good will with which they had been received. His Government stood ready to mobilize the European Union around decisive moves for peace and he urged both parties to take steps to rebuild confidence. This month's events painted a mixed picture. He welcomed the agreement to end the hunger strike of Samer Issawi, but Israel's use of administrative detention was a concern. The continued use of live fire by Israeli Defence Forces had resulted in the deaths of Palestinian teenagers and Molotov cocktails had been used against those forces. He called for investigation into those clashes.

He said economic and political stability was essential for creating the conditions for peace, expressing regret at the resignation of Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister and urging support for the Palestinian institutions he had helped to build. He welcomed the resumed transfer of tax revenues to Palestinians and expected those transfers to continue. On Syria, he expressed outrage at reports of killings by the Government of hundreds of people in the suburbs of Damascus. The United Kingdom was steadfast in its support for Special Envoy Brahimi, stressing that his room for manoeuvre was rapidly shrinking. The regime had used scud missiles against civilians and had allegedly used chemical weapons, and he supported the Secretary-General's investigation in that regard.

He went on to say that more than 50,000 people had died since last draft Security Council resolution had been vetoed in July 2012. The United Kingdom would support opposition efforts to build a political settlement. He also commended Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq which had provided sanctuary to those fleeing Syria, urging them to keep their borders open. The United Kingdom had provided \$260 million in humanitarian funding and called on others to translate their pledges into financial contributions. He called on Syria to urgently facilitate free and unfettered access to all areas of the country, while the Council must address that issue urgently. Those who committed human rights abuses must be held to account and Syria must grant the Commission of Inquiry access to the country.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said the situation in the Middle East remained fragile. That was confirmed by recent rocket fire from Gaza and the response by the Israeli Air Force. In recent days, the West Bank situation had deteriorated with demonstrations following the death of a Palestinian detainee. It was important to ensure those events did not "morph into another wave of violence" and the fragility of the situation was grounds for deep concern. He opposed all manifestations of terror and agreed with fighting it "mercilessly". However, action against civilians was also unacceptable. It was important to give active assistance to ensure resumption of contacts and negotiations between Israel and Palestine without preconditions. That had been spelled out in the Quartet's statement and renewed armed confrontation would prove "deadly" to prospects for the resumption of negotiations. If the ceasefire in Gaza held, the blockade of Gaza needed lifting and Israel, simultaneously, needed to avoid steps that would allow more settlement activities. Halting settlements was vital to building

mutual trust, as was resolving the humanitarian situation and taking action on the issue of prisoners and detainees. He welcomed the agreement that had led to the suspension of Samer Issawi's hunger strike and noted the contribution of Prime Minister Fayyad to establishing Palestinian statehood.

On Syria, he condemned the kidnapping in Aleppo of Greek and Syrian orthodox religious figures, saying such activity "fanned the flames" of ethnic and religious divisions in the country. It had been carried out by extremists in the opposition just after the declaration of principles and proved that the opposition leadership was, therefore, either untrustworthy or incompetent. In addition, it had taken place in the supposed "liberated area" along the Turkish border, so should clearly not have happened. He was "puzzled" over the European Union's decision to allow oil to flow across the Turkish border, saying it was "trampling on the foot of international law and sovereignty". Though billed as a gesture of support to the moderate opposition, the money would flow to the strongest armed groups, made up of "radicals and extremists" associated with Al-Qaida. Also alarming was the readiness of Member States to supply groups with arms, as it enabled continuation of all-out war, further degrading the overall situation and potentially harming Syria's neighbours, too. In connection with that, a number of the allies of the armed opposition were trying to push a harmful resolution in the General Assembly. The humanitarian situation needed addressing, with trust and cooperation between the Government and humanitarian groups, and the politicization of humanitarian groups should be avoided. He called on all groups to stop the violence and to agree on a transitional governing body, as provided for in the Geneva communiqué.

GARY QUINLAN ( [Australia](#) ) supported all efforts to achieve lasting security for Israel, as well as a Palestinian State. A two-State solution would only be realized through negotiations. There was a window of opportunity to reengage in the peace process, which "we simply must not miss", he said, stressing that United States leadership was crucial. The Israeli Prime Minister had reaffirmed his commitment to a two-State solution and to sit at the negotiation table without preconditions. The Palestinian Authority President said he was prepared to implement all commitments and obligations and those pledges must be translated into actions.

He went on to say there were signs of a more conducive environment, welcoming the restraint shown by Israel following recent rocket attacks from Gaza, and equally by Palestinians, in refraining from taking unilateral action in international forums. On other matters, he said settlements threatened the viability of a Palestinian State. Donor support to a Palestinian State was crucial. He regretted the resignation of Salam Fayyad and appreciated his role in building an institutional foundation for a Palestinian State. The Palestinian Authority must not allow those achievements to be lost. Australia looked to Israel to ease restrictions to create a viable Palestinian economy. Palestinians must cease all violence against Israel and unite for peace.

On Syria, he said the situation was at a tipping point. The scale and impacts of the crisis — and its destabilizing consequences for Syria's neighbours — must be a decisive concern for the Council. There were 8,000 Syrian fleeing daily in March. One in four people in Lebanon were Syrian. All parties, especially Syria, must cooperate with the United Nations to allow humanitarian access, including cross-border access. The Council must respond to Special Envoy Brahimi's plea, and he called on both Syria and the opposition to engage in meaningful dialogue for a transition to a democratic country that respected the rule of law. Australia was seriously concerned at the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, and if substantiated, the Council must respond quickly and credibly. It could not continue to fail to help end that catastrophic situation.

MOHAMMED LOULICHI ( [Morocco](#) ) said the Palestinian cause had gone through a "historic and decisive turning point" since interruption of the peace process in 2010. Security Council intervention was needed to get negotiations back up and running. The visit of President Obama and initiatives pushed by Secretary of State Kerry opened "a glimmering of hope" of reinvigoration of negotiations towards a two-State solution. He wished the initiatives every success, recalling that the continued Arab commitment to a lasting and fair peace had been reaffirmed at Doha in March. Arabs were particularly committed to the Arab Peace Initiative, the significance of which had been restated at successive summits. The flexibility of Arabs and Palestinians was impeded by ongoing settlement and colonization, particularly in Jerusalem. That posed a threat to peace, preventing an internationally accepted solution, because settlements had been condemned and rejected by the international community.

Israel flouted Security Council resolutions and prevented an environment that would be conducive to the resumption of negotiations. East Jerusalem had been targeted by a settlement policy that sought to "alter the demographic and cultural composition of a town of great symbolic significance". Morocco had called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities so that the sacred nature of holy sites could be upheld and that Jerusalem could remain a town for the coexistence of religions. He pointed to the hard economic circumstances faced in the occupied Palestinian territories, saying the tough situation threatened to wipe out hard-won gains and jeopardize the viability of a Palestinian State. He welcomed efforts to resolve and prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and called for an end to the blockade, which was a form of collective punishment imposed on 1.6 million Gazans, including refugees. He stressed the need to uphold the ceasefire and avoid attacking civilians, calling on Palestinian political factions to abide by the national reconciliation process. The unity of the Palestinian State was a prerequisite to ensuring its interests were upheld. On the issue of Palestinian prisoners, he said Israel needed to stop administrative detention. He hoped 2013 would be the time for Palestinians to finally forge their own State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Morocco would use its position as a non-permanent Security Council member to support all efforts to revive the peace process and to fulfil the dreams of all people in the region.

He called for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and restated his concerns over the situation faced by the Syrian people at large. All violence there needed to stop and the Security Council needed to unite behind a framework for international efforts to end the killings and to attain a solution that would enshrine the hopes and aspirations of Syrians and respect national and territorial unity. On stability in Lebanon, he praised the spirit of unity demonstrated by the people and was certain that Lebanese authorities could resolve pending matters and bring about a new Government through the constitutional framework.

TOFIG MUSAYEV ( [Azerbaijan](#) ) said discussions on the Middle East brought pressing issues to the forefront, which required coordinated action. It was clear there was no alternative to peace. Negotiations and the establishment of the groundwork for a credible peace process were core international priorities, and recent developments in the region had given hope for moving from a point of standstill. He supported diplomatic efforts by the United States to revive negotiations and contribute to regional stability. The Arab Peace Initiative also outlined steps to achieve a just and lasting solution.

All parties involved should work to "breathe new life" into the peace process, he said, create a conducive environment and establish a credible political horizon for a two-State solution. One prerequisite for success was to ensure the process was guided by the normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations and the objective of finding a settlement that was based on international law. Tangible outcomes would be impossible in the absence of dedicated efforts. Israeli settlements were a serious obstacle to the peace process and prospects for achieving a two-State solution. Azerbaijan rejected settlement activities, which were illegal and must stop immediately.

He went on to say that the 21 November 2012 ceasefire also must be upheld, urging in that context, that cultural diversity be used as an advantage by promoting intercultural dialogue and negating both religious and ethnic intolerance. He supported efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation under President Abbas, saying that economic support must be complemented by humanitarian assistance. It was critical to end the suffering of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The moment of opportunity could not be lost. He expressed Azerbaijan's firm belief that peace and prosperity was achievable with political will, and greater efforts at the regional and international levels.

MASOOD KHAN ( [Pakistan](#) ) said he felt "a slight tinge of optimism" in Mr. Feltman's briefing and "a flicker of hope" had appeared after the visits of President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to the region. The Security Council, the Quartet and the regional leaders needed to energize the stalled peace process. A two-State solution was rapidly vanishing. Palestine and Israel had not met for the past two-and-a-half years. Mr. Kerry warned last week that the chance to create a Palestinian State alongside Israel would be lost in one to two years. This was "not a gloomy forecast, but a reality developing on the ground". Ongoing settlement construction and Israel's plans for new settlements in E1 area would hinder the two-State solution by cutting the West Bank into two and destroying the contiguity of the Palestinian State. A one-State reality would be unlawful and unsustainable. In the interest of both Israel and Palestine, new Israeli settlement plans must be frozen and earlier decisions rescinded. It was in the interest of Israel to work towards a long-term and sustainable resolution of the conflict. Ending its occupation of the Syrian Golan and Lebanese lands was also imperative. Recent elections in Israel and consequent formation of Government there should not be cited as justification for reduced interest in the resumption of the peace process.

Urgent measures were needed to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, he said, outlining several steps. Gaza had become "one big prison". The blockade on Gaza, as demanded by Council resolution 1860 (2009), must be lifted. Heightened restrictions on movements of people and goods and reduction of fishing limits must be removed. Checkpoints and barriers must be removed from the West Bank, because they interfere with mobility and trade, and the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues should be transferred to Ramallah on time. The inhuman treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails should be stopped. An independent investigation into the death of Arafat Jaradat in Israeli custody must be initiated and concluded to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Turning to Syria, he said that "Syria is killing Syrian", and "the crisis is assuming more sinister dimensions by the day". Noting that "dictates of realpolitik" had immobilized the international community and the Council from making any meaningful intervention, he warned that things had reached "a tipping point". Syrians, regional countries and major Powers needed to sit with Mr. Brahimi to implement the Geneva communiqué, which contained all the right ingredients for political dialogue and dispensation. If there was any fresh thinking, it needed to be developed fast to stop further carnage.

GERT ROSENTHAL ( Guatemala ) said the only way out of the Syrian conflict was for both parties to lay down their weapons and negotiate a political solution. Militarization of the conflict would not resolve the underlying problems that gave rise to demonstrations in Syria two years ago. Continuation of the armed struggle would only increase sectarian violence and risk spreading to neighbouring countries. He was also very concerned by the emergence of groups associated with terrorist organizations that had become part of the armed opposition. Such groups should not be allowed to take advantage of the existing instability. He acknowledged efforts to create the so-called Syrian National Coalition, but was concerned that the Coalition was being labelled the "legitimate representative of the Syrian people". Any transition in Syria should be the product of a Syrian-led process that respected the rights of all parties. It was premature to legitimize a group that may not enjoy the Syrian public's widespread support and, much less, had been democratically elected. He hoped that group was focused on facilitating interlocutors to advance peaceful negotiations between the parties. The perpetrators of all crimes in Syria should be held to account. The Syrian people's suffering must not be permitted to continue. He welcomed pledges to the humanitarian response plan in Syria, which must be effective.

He hoped that, in the short term, Israel and Palestine could commit to the peace process. On 8 April, the Guatemalan Government recognized Palestine as a state based on Palestine's right to self-determination. That did not ignore, however, the importance of re-launching direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, to achieve a final agreement that ensured peaceful coexistence. He hoped the Quartet would resume a proactive role towards that end. This year should be marked by the long-delayed resumption of substantive negotiations towards a final agreement on all outstanding issues. Work by the United States in recent weeks may help steer the process and give the parties the necessary push to launch a much-needed dialogue. He was concerned by the poor state of the Palestinian economy and its negative impact on efforts to build State institutions. The international community must reaffirm its support for the Palestinian Authority and encourage countries in the region, as well as emerging economies, to aid Palestinian economic revitalization.

MARÍA CRISTINA PERCEVAL ( Argentina ) said the upcoming months would be decisive in reviving the Arab-Israeli peace process. She believed that another failure could seriously damage prospects for a two-State solution, seeing a "window of opportunity" that could not withstand further delay. However, she believed the situation on the ground posed many challenges. Israel did not seem to be planning any modification to its settlement policy and that was a tangible and clear obstacle in the way of peace. Additionally, there was no solution to the issue of Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli custody and detentions had intensified in recent times. She welcomed the legal decision in the case of Samer Issawi, which she said was "vital to the preservation of peace". Rocket attacks on Israel also deserved round condemnation. They demonstrated the fragility of the ceasefire signed at the end of 2012.

The current standstill could be overcome, though, and the United States President's recent trip and the rapid follow-up by the Secretary of State were significant events. The success of the new impulses would hinge on the extent that the new commitment led to a resumption of conversation between actors within and outside the region. The Security Council had an important and constructive role to play, reaffirming the framework for the peace process and ensuring neither side did anything to exacerbate the situation. Plans to promote the economic and social development, institutional consolidation and fiscal sustainability of Palestine were also welcome, but she was convinced through experience that development and social cohesion would not function in isolation. A political horizon of a peaceful solution was a prerequisite for any meaningful, long-term strengthening of the Palestinian territories. The humanitarian situation needed improvement and extending the fishing limit from the shores of Gaza could make a big difference. Lifting restriction on the importation of building materials would also help. Those measures could be taken rapidly and fully and there should be no delay. She said the registration of Palestinian voters marked a significant step towards establishing a unity Government, but substantial problems remained for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.

Prospects for a rapid solution to the Syria crisis were not looking good, she said. Signs of openness to dialogue had not been sufficiently developed and recent serious incidents, particularly on the Lebanon-Syria border, suggested the conflict remained in a spiral of violence. She reiterated that the only possible solution was political, yet there were daily reports of increased military support from external actors on both sides. That only helped to continue the war and Argentina had consistently urged an end to the supply of arms. The Security Council had spoken unanimously on the humanitarian situation, showing that it was possible to confirm the need for a political solution. Difference among Council members had been overcome to achieve that. She supported the principles set out repeatedly by Lakhdar Brahimi, which also showed her support for the Geneva communiqué. That showed, she hoped, that the Security Council was ready to find a political solution through inclusive, candid dialogue with the Syrian people. She added that she would also continue to watch the situation in Lebanon with concern as the crisis was an "existential threat" to the country. She supported Lebanon's Government dissociation policy which aimed to preserve stability.

KODJO MENAN ( Togo ) expressed deep concern at events that continued to unfold in the Middle East, stressing that it was time for Palestinians and Israelis to decide to come together, as the status quo had lasted too long. Both sides must honour their commitments made for a two-State solution and take steps to build mutual trust. In that regard, he welcomed the 19 April opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing point for delivering humanitarian goods to Gaza. The blockade of Gaza must be lifted, while uncharged Palestinian detainees and prisoners must be released. Settlement activities also must end. He also urged Hamas to control armed groups that refused to renounce violence.

Palestinian refugees living in camps were also a concern, he said, pressing UNRWA to assist those thousands of people and condemning attacks against that agency. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict required direct negotiations, and to that end, he called on both the Council and the Quartet to exert pressure on both sides to set a new calendar to resume talks. That was the only way to achieve a lasting settlement to the conflict. He also urged reactivating the Arab Peace Plan and the Madrid Principles. The creation of a viable Palestinian State living alongside a secure Israel with recognized borders must be the objective.

Turning to Syria, he recalled the destruction of infrastructure, unbridled killings and human rights violations, saying: "This country is self-destructing." Ending the war was the only solution. He supported the Council's 18 April call to end the violence and begin negotiations for a political transition, based on the Geneva communiqué. In Lebanon, he was concerned about insecurity along its Syrian border and the scale of the humanitarian needs it faced. Syrian refugees, estimated at 1.2 million people, only fuelled Togo's concerns, as the related impacts were felt throughout Lebanon, threatening its peace and security. He called on donors to back the Lebanese Government and to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees.

KIMSOOK ( Republic of Korea ) pointed to a "faint glimmer of hope" that allowed for cautious optimism in the Middle East peace process. Israel and Palestine should work towards a negotiated resolution. The vicious cycle of violence must be broken. He condemned the rocket attacks from Gaza, saying both parties must abide by last November's ceasefire agreement. He commended Israel's Government for re-opening the Kerem Shalom crossings on 18 April. The plight of those in Gaza could not justify hostility against humanitarian facilities and staff. The violent acts of protesters against the United Nations food distribution centre were deplorable. The safety and security of United Nations humanitarian property and staff must be guaranteed. He was encouraged by the United States Government's efforts, through visits by that country's President and Secretary of State, to engage both sides, as well as neighbouring countries. Such "shuttle diplomacy" would create an atmosphere conducive to resuming peace talks. He welcomed the reported agreement that would seek ways to support Palestine's economic development. He expressed concern that Israel's demolitions had resumed recently in Area C. He urged the Israeli Government to stop building more settlements. He welcomed the agreement between Israel and Palestine on UNESCO's activities in the Old City of Jerusalem and hoped it would prompt more

meaningful steps forward. He hoped that under the leadership of President Abbas, a capable successor to Prime Minister Fayyad would be appointed soon.

Turning to the turmoil in Lebanon brought on by the resignation of that country's Prime Minister and the influx of refugees from neighbouring Syria, he said all political players should unite to secure its political sovereignty and territorial integrity at "this critical juncture". On Syria, he said last week's joint statement by the heads of five United Nations humanitarian agencies warning that the humanitarian response had reached its limits demonstrated the urgency of finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. The global community must continue to support vulnerable groups, such as women and children. He urged the parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and asked countries to support the Syrian case's referral to the International Criminal Court. In June, his Government would host the third meeting of the Working Group on Economic Recovery and Development of the Friends of the People of Syria.

LI BAODONG (China) said "the core and root cause of the Middle East problem" was the Palestinian question, and he was concerned about the long-term stagnation of peace talks. Nonetheless, a recent stepping up of efforts to return to talks had seen both parties show goodwill. Welcoming those efforts, he hoped negotiations would restart as soon as possible with China open to all efforts to bridge gaps. It was 20 years since signing of the Oslo Accords and it was vital that this year not be another failure. He said that settlements not only stopped peace talks, but even stopped their resumption. Israel needed to stop settlement activity and also needed to take up the issue of detainees. The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remained grave and he hoped the blockade would be lifted as soon as possible, to alleviate the situation in Gaza.

The Quartet needed to play a role in promoting dialogue, as did the Security Council, he said. Political dialogue needed to be based on United Nations resolutions, principles like land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. The ultimate goal was sovereignty and an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, living alongside Israel in peace. China supported the "just cause" of the Palestinian people and had promoted talks using all means. China's envoy would visit the both parties to exchange views and to carry out peace facilitation work. That would play a constructive role in establishing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Syria had reached a critical stage, he said, urging all parties to achieve, as quickly as possible, a ceasefire and cessation of violence. Political dialogue should be launched and a Syrian-led transition process should begin. The international community needed to step up its efforts to promote a positive and just settlement of the issue.

EUGÈNE-RICHARD GASANA (Rwanda), whose country holds the Council's presidency for the month, said a sustainable solution to Middle East peace process must be a strategic goal, with all parties throwing their full moral, diplomatic and economic support behind that objective. The Council must ensure decisions were translated into action. On 20 March, the United States President had visited the region, a positive step in the revival of the peace process. Rwanda, like the African Union, believed a two-State solution was the only viable solution, which involved the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State living alongside a secure Israel.

He urged both sides to take confidence-building measures to advance the peace process, saying that any measures that undermined that process must be avoided. Israel should be fully recognized by regional partners and be able to live securely, while the Palestinian aspiration of a politically independent and economically viable State must be fulfilled. All parties must abide by the ceasefire. He expressed concern at the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank, calling for an end to statements that could fuel tensions. While supporting the Quartet, Rwanda deplored the diplomatic impasse and called for redoubled efforts.

The situation in Syria was "a stain on the world's conscience" with a worsening humanitarian situation, characterized by thousands of deaths and more than 3 million internally displaced persons, he continued, underlining that the international community was obliged to address the situation. The International Commission of Inquiry had noted that human rights and international law violations had been committed. Now, chemical weapons had allegedly been used. Rwanda would work to encourage a strong and unified response to bring about a political transition in Syria. The Arab League should assume a role in a political solution. He expressed hope that Lebanon would soon be able to control its borders, calling on that Government to take action against Hizbullah's aggressions. The stalemate in the Middle East was not impossible to resolve, but realistic solutions, based on international norms, were needed. For its part, the Council must seek and enforce sustainable solutions to conflicts in the Middle East.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said Council resolution 1701 (2006) called on the international community to urge Israel to honour its commitments and stop violating Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air. The calm reigning in south Lebanon reflected his country's commitment to that resolution, he said, commending the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Efforts must be enhanced to move from a cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire. Israel's occupation of a region in the north violated its commitments under resolution 1701 (2006) and he called on Israel to stop its occupation of Shebaa Farms.

The situation in Syria continued to worsen, he said, noting that Lebanon was committed to a disassociation policy, pursuant to which it would not allow sending arms or combatants to Syria, or the establishment of any training camps on its territory. The influx of refugees to Lebanon was increasing — by 20,000 in the last week alone — and Lebanon was no longer able to meet their housing, medical and food needs. Its borders, however, would remain open. He called for an international conference on Syrian refugees on burden sharing and the establishment of camps in Syria, far from the confrontations.

Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, he said Israel's construction of the separation wall, land confiscation and control of water sources exacerbated Palestinian difficulties. The Council had remained silent on the conditions that had led to the deaths of two Palestinian prisoners. A recent report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) documented abject and arbitrary torture, humiliation and other abuses inflicted on Palestinian children. UNICEF had called for all measures to be taken to ensure appropriate treatment, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What was preventing the Council from adopting a statement to reflect those documented events?, he asked.

MOOTAZ AHMADEIN KHALIL (Egypt), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement and Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), called on the Security Council to respond as soon as possible to a request received from Palestine for assessment of their membership claim. He condemned the continued illegal settlement activity by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. The international community should work towards the immediate release of prisoners and detainees, suffering "flagrant abuses" and death in Israeli prisons. He saluted Samer Issawi for his hunger strike, saying he held Israel fully responsible for his safety.

He called for an urgent review of the Quartet "mechanism", as it had achieved no progress in four years. It could not even agree at present on whether or not to meet. He supported United States' efforts to reinvigorate the peace process and welcomed the easing of fiscal constraints on Palestinians. Continued Israeli violations of calm in Gaza were worrying, as were its tightened embargo on the enclave, which also restricted Palestinian fishermen. Egypt was investigating media claims that two missiles had been launched from the Sinai. He called for an immediate end to the hardships facing the Syrian refugees and urged Israel to end its occupation of the Syrian Golan. The Council should deal seriously with the Palestinian question and implement resolutions to end Israeli settlement activities, which were the fundamental cause of the region's instability.

AHMED FATHALLA, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, said the group's recent summit had adopted resolution 574 (2013), outlining that a just, comprehensive peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the only just solution. It also reaffirmed that "Palestine" was a full partner in the peace process, and called for continued support for a complete cessation of settlement activities. Since the General Assembly had elevated Palestine to a non-member observer State, the peace process had been in a stalemate. The League held Israel fully responsible for the delays, in part because of its continued settlement expansion. The Secretary-General, in his report of 8 March, had said 2013 was "the year of decision" for the peace process. In other recent developments, the United States' delegation had stated that the country was committed to direct negotiations.

He cited as a most important development for Syria, the summit's 26 March adoption of resolution 580 (2013), which welcomed the national coalition of the



opposition to occupy a seat in the Arab League. It commended the efforts of Syria's neighbours in easing urgent refugee needs and called for an international conference at the United Nations for Syria's reconstruction. The League's Secretary-General had held a meeting with the High Commissioner for Refugees to address the crisis. There was no alternative to a political solution. In April, the United Nations, the Arab League and the Joint Special Representative had discussed the need for the parties in Syria to begin that process, and the Secretary-General had urged the Council to help achieve that solution. The speaker also pressed the Council to take such action.

ROBLE OLHAYE ( [Djibouti](#) ), speaking on behalf of the OIC, said it was "unfavourable" to miss fundamental opportunities created by upgrading Palestine's status in the United Nations. Yet, Israel continued its illegal policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through settlement expansion, building the apartheid wall, detaining thousands of Palestinians, and illegally besieging Gaza, threatening to undermine the two-State solution and destabilize the region. He called on the international community to ensure that Israel stopped its settlement policies and enabled the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

He said the Council must uphold justice, freedom, international law and international resolutions for the peace process to proceed and for the Palestinian people to achieve their right to self-determination and independence and a just settlement for refugees. He was very concerned by human rights violations against Palestinians in Israeli jails. The death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyah last month exposed Israel's inhumane policies and systematic violations against the prisoners. The international community must intervene urgently to defend Palestinian prisoners' human rights, save their lives and pressure Israel to respect international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions and immediately release the prisoners. He reiterated the Conference's unwavering demand for Israel to immediately end the Gaza blockade and open all crossing points.

He was very concerned about the ongoing violence and destruction in Syria. He stressed the need to preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and called for the immediate cessation of violence, killings and destruction, and for respect of Islamic values, human rights, and for saving Syria from the danger of all-out civil war. He urged the Syrian regime to stop killing its citizens and to engage in serious dialogue with all parties to pave the way for democratic reforms. The international community, particularly the Council, should assume its responsibility and act promptly to stop the killing, destruction and displacement of the Syrian people and to find a peaceful, lasting solution to the crisis.

ABDALLAH Y. AL-MOUALLIM ( [Saudi Arabia](#) ), associating with the League of Arab States, the OIC and the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the reaching of a just and equitable solution to the Palestinian question remained a "disappointing mirage". Israel showed "defiance and disdain" for the international community's will by proceeding with settlement expansion, mistreating and devaluing Palestinian prisoners' lives and allowing settlers to continue with brutal attacks and assaults on the Palestinian people. He urged the international community to compel Israel to respect children's rights, drawing the Council's attention to UNICEF's report that "explicitly depicted the brutal, inhuman punishments" imposed by Israel on Palestinian children held in their prisons.

Peace remained the "strategic option", he said, adding, however, that Arab States believed Israeli aggression undermined the chances of reaching a just peace based on a two-State solution within the 1967 borders. "Enough of settlements; enough of aggression; enough of occupation," he declared.

He said that the situation in Syria was deteriorating daily, with the number of refugees having swelled to an estimated 3 million, burdening neighbouring countries and posing a serious threat to the region's security and stability. The world had condemned the Syrian regime and had stressed the need for an equitable solution. The opposition had taken "bold steps" in uniting under the banner of the National Syrian Coalition, recognized by more than 100 countries. It was time for the Syrian people to regain its appropriate position in international organizations and bodies, having "loudly declared its will be demanding the departure" of President Assad's regime, which had lost its legitimacy when it committed aggression and atrocities against its own people.

REGINA MARIA CORDEIRO DUNLOP ( [Brazil](#) ) reiterated her call for Israel to cease all settlement construction "immediately and unconditionally" and to reconsider its decision to build in the so-called "E1 area", as well as to dismantle all settlement construction. On the heels of the recent diplomatic activity in the region, including President Obama's visit to Israel and Palestine, she urged Israelis and Palestinians to take advantage of the "momentum" and show the political resolve needed to reach the goal of a Palestinian State. Fostering inclusive economic development in Palestine was essential to consolidate the State and build a solid basis for lasting peace. Many civil society organizations from both sides were a "source of hope in the search for peace", and it was important, therefore, to give them adequate voice.

Turning to Syria, she expressed dismay at the continued and unabated violence against civilians, and called on stakeholders to actively seek to convince all sides that there was no military solution. It was critical to stop the flow of weapons into Syria, as it further fed the "erroneous perception" that military victory was a realistic possibility. She regretted that political differences had prevented the Council from engaging in the implementation of the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria, which provided the guidelines for a viable negotiation process. Lastly, she urged all parties to facilitate safe, unfettered and immediate access of humanitarian organizations to those in need.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chairman, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, recalled that, at the 17-18 April meeting in Caracas, the Committee had called on the international community to re-engage with Israel and the State of Palestine to remove obstacles to negotiation, as well as for a revitalized Quartet. The Committee had strongly condemned settlements and demanded their cessation, and had deplored the abuse of Palestinian prisoners, who were often detained without trial. Participating delegations had demanded their release, including "pre-Oslo" detainees.

Hopeful that Assembly resolution 67/19 (2012) would accelerate momentum in the Council towards full United Nations membership for the State of Palestine, he said the Committee considered its 29 November 2012 passage a "vote of confidence" that that Palestine had met the Charter criteria for statehood and was ready to assume duties that came with membership. The Committee confirmed that the State of Palestine could use International Court of Justice's dispute settlement mechanisms. It had also decided to ask the Assembly to proclaim an International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the delegation of the [European Union](#), said the bloc was aware of the obstacles standing in the way of a comprehensive peace, but he felt that a "decisive breakthrough is possible, and that it must take place very soon". Israeli settlement activities, illegal under international law, impeded peace and undermined the viability of a two-State solution. The Union's recent emphasis on economic development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in Area C of the West Bank, was fully in line with the options and initiatives currently under discussion, and it was "ready and willing to take its support to the next level".

He said the Union condemned in the strongest terms the latest rocket fire from Gaza and rocket attacks at the Israeli city of Eilat. At the same time, he acknowledged the achievements of outgoing Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in institution-building and in strengthening the rule of law and recalled that the Union had played a major role in bring about those results, prompting international financial institutions to declare that Palestine was above the threshold for a functioning State. If an agreement was reached to end the conflict, the door would open to enhanced cooperation between the region and the Union.

The Syrian Government bore the primary responsibility for the ongoing violence in that country, and the Union condemned the widespread and systematic human rights and international humanitarian law violations and insisted there should be no impunity; the Council could refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. The Union persevered towards a credible political solution through a Syrian-led transition based on the Geneva communiqué, and it welcomed the Syrian National Coalition as legitimate representatives. The Union was the leading humanitarian donor in the conflict, with its total response, including pledged support, at nearly €800 million. "But, money is only one aspect of the problem" — humanitarian assistance must reach all areas in need. The conflict had already spread beyond the national borders, with "a huge potential to destabilize the entire region". The Council must follow all "spill-over threats". He was concerned that chemical weapons might have been used, and declared that their use, whether by a State or non-State actor, was abhorrent and must be unreservedly condemned.



KAZUYOSHI UMEMOTO ( [Japan](#) ) joined other speakers in urging Israel to freeze settlement activities. He appreciated Israel's resumption of tax revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority, but was concerned that the issue of prisoners could harm the peace process. The entire international community needed to mobilize for substantial progress this year and he welcomed the renewed United States commitment to the peace process. Japan would strengthen its own commitment and engagement with stakeholders, which had remained strong since the Oslo Accords. Last year, it had provided \$85 million to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA, and it had launched social projects in East Jerusalem, Area C and Gaza to address the needs of the socially vulnerable. The Japan-led "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" aimed at promoting regional cooperation and had made steady progress since 2006. Japan had also hosted the Conference on Cooperation Among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, with follow-up meetings planned.

He said that last week's briefing on Syria had been "yet another occasion to listen to appalling accounts of tragic incidents taking place on the ground every day". Japan actively supported the Group of Friends of the Syrian People and condemned the Syrian authorities for failing to protect their own citizens. It was "hardly realistic" to expect a smooth political transition while President Assad remained in power, he said, while underlining the need to deal with the threat posed by extremists. He supported Mr. Brahimi's efforts and hoped the Syrian National Coalition would consolidate its base to play a major role in a Syrian-led political transition. He regretted the Security Council's failure to bring about political transition, which had led to his favourable consideration of Qatar's plan to work through the General Assembly to explore a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué.

Syrian authorities should refrain from using chemical weapons and from transferring them to non-State actors, he said, insisting that the Secretary-General's investigation into alleged use of those weapons should be granted full and unfettered access. "Rapid and unimpeded access" should be ensured for aid organizations and funding commitments should be met. Japan had disbursed the \$65 million it had pledged at the High-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, bringing its total contribution to \$805 million.

AHMED AL-JARMAN ( [United Arab Emirates](#) ) said that Israel's continued settlement expansion, expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and gross violations against the Palestinians were further proof of its lack of sincerity and commitment to a Palestinian State. He condemned all serious and grave Israeli practices that had hindered global peace efforts, and called on the international community to shoulder its full responsibility to the Charter to pressure Israel to halt its illegitimate activities and to expeditiously resume peace talks in line with the Arab Peace Initiative. He was gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation resulting from the Gaza closures. He called on Israel to end the blockade in accordance with Council resolution 1860 (2009), remove all Israeli checkpoints in other cities and villages and immediately release Palestinians in Israeli jails.

He was concerned by the escalating violence in Syria and the suffering inflicted on the Syrian people. The international community must shoulder its responsibility; a political process was needed to end the bloodshed and hand over power to a transitional authority in an orderly manner. The United Arab Emirates had provided aid to Syrian refugees in neighbouring States, and he renewed its support for Mr. Brahimi. Concerned about nuclear proliferation in the region, he said he was disappointed that the conference on to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone had not been held. It should be convened without delay, he urged, calling on Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and on Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and remove all doubts about its nuclear programme.

BASHAR JA'AFARI ( [Syria](#) ) said the "overwhelming enthusiasm" for Chapter VI resolutions dissipated when it came to Israel. Guilty of systematic, documented violations of international law and international human rights law, no Israeli official had ever been held accountable. The desire to pass documents to the International Criminal Court evaporated when it came to Israel. Implacably, Israel continued with exponentially increasing settlement activity, and while some regimes were subjected to sanctions, Israel had been spared them, despite the illegality of settlements and the fact that they were a clear obstacle to peace. Some, however, considered Israel to be a "racist, thuggish State" because it flouted United Nations resolutions and had authored many racist laws since 1968.

Still, he continued, there had been no genuine calls to free Palestinian prisoners and very few called for detention camps to be opened to observers, despite the fact that many lost their lives there because of torture, medical neglect or premeditation. Israel had introduced nuclear weapons to the Middle East, preventing the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. Nonetheless, it was States participating in peaceful nuclear programmes in conformity with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons that were subjected to threats and sanctions. Many at the United Nations sought to "sweep under the rug" those paradoxical realities. The United Nations should be renamed the "Organization of Major Influencing Countries" because the nightmare of the Palestinians had not been enough to provoke the international community to adopt earnest measures towards a fair solution.

The United Nations had failed Syrians living under Israeli occupation, and he questioned the Organization's human rights mechanisms, which failed to bring an end to Israeli human rights violations. There had been no international reaction to the discriminatory, racist policies of the Israeli regime, or to shots fired into Syrian territory. Israel had also begun searching for oil in the occupied Syrian Golan. In the area of separation between Israel and Syria, Israel was aiding terrorists, taking those injured in fighting to Israeli hospitals and then bringing them back to the same area of separation. That not only violated international law, but also exposed the lives of United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) workers in the area. He pointed in particular to the kidnapping of UNTSO peacekeepers, which were part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

He said it was dangerous to introduce new subjects under an agreed item. He, therefore, would not respond to allegations made about his own country as that would "kill" the point of the meeting. However, he noted that many countries were trying to provoke an intra-Islamic conflict in order to bury the Israel-Palestine conflict and the possibility of a two-State solution. Representatives of those countries had confirmed that intention in their speeches, which were clearly attempts to steer attention away from the real matter at hand. He addressed the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who he said had made provocative comments, and urged them to address the miserable situations of their own populations, who had no political rights. Those States were also responsible for the spread of Wahabbi and Salafist terrorism. That had changed the very nature of Islam, which was supposed to be based on tolerance.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI ( [Iran](#) ), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that regrettably, Israel had continued its colonization of Palestinian land, its blockade of Gaza, its military raids and arrest campaigns, and all forms of collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation, despite regional and international peace efforts. The Movement condemned Israel's continued unlawful detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children, women and numerous elected officials, under harsh, inhumane conditions that included the use of torture and all other forms of physical and psychological mistreatment. He called for the release of those political prisoners.

He also condemned Israel's settlement activities, which had displaced thousands of Palestinians from their lands in the Jordan Valley, putting at risk thousands more. A similar situation was transpiring in East Jerusalem, where the occupying Power had pursued a "quiet transfer" or "de-population" of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants to ensure a Jewish majority in the city. The Movement also condemned Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, and called on all parties concerned to fully implement Council resolution 1701 (2006) to end the current fragility and avoid the resurgence of hostilities. As for the occupied Syrian Golan, he expressed concern over the recent violations of the 1974 agreement on disengagement, as those breaches would heighten the risk of tension and confrontation in the area, and he requested Israel to withdraw fully from the area to the borders of 4 June 1967, based on relevant Council resolutions.

YURIY SERGEYEV ( [Ukraine](#) ) said the solution to the question of Palestine should be based on full implementation of Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Madrid peace conference outcome and the Oslo Accords. He rejected all terrorist acts committed for political goals. Any and all violent or provocative acts by radical elements should stop immediately, as they only exacerbated violence. At present, the parties had no other alternative than to overcome their differences and return to the negotiating table. He strongly appealed to all sides to refrain from unilateral action that could further aggravate the situation or pre-empt the outcome of the final status talks. Ukraine was determined to contribute to the search for a comprehensive Middle East peace, dependent on realization by the Palestinians of their legitimate rights.

He reaffirmed Ukraine's strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. The United Nations should take a leading role in

resolving the crisis. He strongly supported the efforts by Special Adviser Brahimi, and said the parties to the conflict must do their utmost to cease armed violence in order to pave the way for a Syrian-led political transition. A national dialogue among all strata of Syrian society and the introduction of social and political reforms was the only way to resolve internal problems effectively. He echoed call of the Secretary-General and Mr. Brahimi to avoid militarization of the conflict and to alleviate the suffering of innocent people. Ukraine was doing its part to provide humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians, including refugees in neighbouring countries.

ASOKE KUMAR MUKERJI ( [India](#) ) said that the peace process was passing through its most difficult phase in recent times. For more than two years, the parties had not held any official meetings; efforts of the international community, including the Quartet, had failed to have an impact; and intensification of settlement activities was fast eroding the very foundation of a two-State solution. Indeed, any meaningful political process must put an end to Israeli settlement activities. Although Israel had recently taken some measures to allow flow of essential goods into Gaza, the blockade remained in force and was adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. To help close the Palestinian Government's financing gap, currently estimated at \$1.2 billion, he said it was important that the international community continue to support the financial needs of the Palestinian Authority.

India had been the first non-Arab country to have recognized the State of Palestine, in 1988, he said, noting that its "bonds of friendship" with the Palestinian people had been strengthened by regular interactions in the form of political support, socioeconomic development and extended material assistance. As in previous years, India had pledged \$10 million in 2012 in budgetary support and had contributed \$1 million to UNRWA. Furthermore, India was involved in implementing projects, bilaterally and through the IBSA [ India, Brazil, South Africa] Dialogue Forum fund in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and school construction. Lastly, he expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation in Syria, stressing that only a Syrian-led process that met the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society could resolve the crisis.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ ( [Cuba](#) ) said the main political problem in the Middle East was Israel's systematic aggression against Palestine. The Council must immediately adopt concrete steps to ensure Israel ended its abuses and illegal policies and practices. Israel's behaviour deliberately contravened United Nations resolutions and international law, threatened regional and global peace and security, and violated the human rights of an entire people, making it the major obstacle to a just, comprehensive peace in the region. Additionally, the Council must approve without further delay Palestine's 2011 request to be recognized as a full Member State. Cuba supported the Palestinians' legitimate, just struggle for self-determination and creation of their own State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He called on Israel to comply with international law and end its occupation of all Arab territories.

He said his country was closely following the Syrian situation and its international impact. Information available on it was often manipulated. He was alarmed by the call for regime change, based on the use of force and violence. Instead, such voices should contribute to dialogue and negotiations. "The Security Council was not conceived as an instrument to serve some Powers in order to provoke regime change in selected countries," he said, expressing concern about intentions to foster Council action aimed at "increasing violence, undermining a sovereign Government, generating insecurity and leading a nation to a social and humanitarian crisis of unforeseen consequences".

Continuing, he said the Council was obligated to promote peace, not violence; to prevent destabilization, not to finance, arm and train those destabilizing; and to protect innocent people, not to manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. He objected to manoeuvring by the NATO to convince the Council to approve aggression in Syria. He also rejected the complicity of big media to distort reality. Cuba condemned violent acts against innocent civilians in Syria, and rejected any attempt to use protection of civilians as a pretext for foreign direct or indirect intervention. He reaffirmed Syrian people's right to self-determination and sovereignty.

SHAVENDRA SILVA ( [Sri Lanka](#) ) stressed the urgency to end the oppression of Palestinians on their own land. Settlement activities contravened the Fourth Geneva Convention and contributed to the recurrence of violence in the region. There had been repeated calls to freeze such activity, which had been condemned as illegal by the Security Council, General Assembly, Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice. Ending those practices was essential to improve the situation on the ground and to build confidence. Meanwhile, 80 per cent of families in Gaza depended on humanitarian aid for their survival, owing to the blockade. He urged it to be lifted, per resolution 1860 (2009).

He said that both parties must create the environment to facilitate peace. In that connection, there was an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume substantive negotiations. Israel must protect Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and cease actions that contravened international law. Indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians, including rocket fire from Gaza, only widened the gap between the parties. Continued engagement was important to find a just and durable solution, and Sri Lanka supported the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the inalienable rights of Palestinians and achievement of a two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders. He was confident that Palestinian reconciliation efforts would continue, and he supported Palestine's application for full United Nations membership.

MOHAMED KHALED KHIARI ( [Tunisia](#) ) said peace efforts were in a stalemate with limited visible hope for the impasse being broken. He placed full responsibility at Israel's door. Among other things, its continued annexation was a policy of fait accompli to separate East Jerusalem from the surrounding West Bank. He denounced that policy along with increased settlement activity and escalating violence against Islamic and Christian places of worship. Prisoner abuse also gravely breached human rights and international humanitarian law. A firm and urgent move by the international community was needed to avert the explosive tension hanging over the area. Israel's arbitrary arrests of women and children fuelled those tensions.

He called for the resumption of negotiations on a fair and honest basis, saying that would require an end to such practices, including addressing the issue of Palestinian prisoners and the Gaza blockade. Those were the basic requirements. A durable peace could only be realized with Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan. There must be a return to pre-1967 borders for an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Syria, he said, was also worrying, including because of the situation's potentially enormous regional consequences, especially on the humanitarian front. He supported the aspirations of the Syrian people in achieving democracy and emphasized the need for an expedited political solution to put an end to a crisis that could no longer be accepted. He also stressed the importance of preserving Syria's sovereignty and territorial unity.

GEIR PEDERSEN ( [Norway](#) ) said the paralysis in the Council was worsening the catastrophic situation in Syria, and he urged it to take a clear, unanimous stand against the continuing gross violations of international humanitarian law. He urged all countries to stop the flow of weapons to Syria, adding that a political solution was the only way to save the Syrian people from further suffering, for which the regime bore primary responsibility. The Syrian Government must start transferring executive power, with a view to enabling a meaningful political transition to a pluralistic, representative Syria. Opposition groups must contribute to a meaningful political dialogue and negotiate within the framework of the Geneva communiqué. The Council must find a way to promote a political transition based on that text, and support Mr. Brahimi's work. At present, the Coalition was the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The litmus test was whether the international community would succeed in making the situation better for all Syrians, ensuring that the rights of minorities were protected.

He called on Syria's Government and the opposition groups to respect international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights and to desist from the despicable practice of gender-based violence. Those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held to account. Since March 2011, Norway had provided \$75 million in humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees and those suffering inside Syria.

Turning to the Middle East peace process, he said he was encouraged by the recent visits by United States' leaders to re-engage the parties. He fully supported the call for an immediate return to the negotiating table. On 19 March, Norway had chaired the spring meeting of the donor support group for Palestine, in Brussels. To fully succeed, that State-building exercise must be accompanied by meaningful steps towards a two-State solution. For the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority to operate more sustainably, Israel must collect and transfer regular and predictable taxes and customs. He also called for freedom of

movement and access in the West Bank, higher levels of Palestinian exports to Israel, better access for Palestinians to natural resources in Area C, normalization of the Gaza situation, and continued reform of the Palestinian Authority.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO ( Venezuela ) said the recurrent practices of colonialists and imperialists fragmented national States, fuelled ethnic religious and cultural differences, mercenary activities and terrorism. Such interventions disrupted peace and stability in the Middle East. He expressed concern over Israel's warmongering actions against the Palestinians. The Venezuelan people admired the Palestinian people's endurance and supported Palestine's right to be a full United Nations Member State. He demanded that Israel withdraw to pre-1967 borders, in line with resolution 242 (1967). He "claimed" the right of Palestinians to have East Jerusalem as their capital and the return of refugees to their homeland. He demanded the release of Palestinian prisoners and an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan. Those who had committed crimes covered by the Rome Statute must pay for them. He added that it was scandalous that Palestinians required special permits to enter and move within their own territory.

He demanded respect for Syria, adding that political dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the opposition was the only way to settle that conflict. He supported Mr. Brahimi's efforts and expressed concern over the intention to diminish or manipulate the importance of mediation and dialogue as the way to achieve peace, while irresponsibly promoting war, in an effort to divide a sovereign State. He regretted that arms were being supplied from abroad to groups involved in terrorist activities and which refused to engage in political dialogue. The interference of foreign Powers was a clear violation of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. Diplomatic recognition at the United Nations of "irregular" groups outside the Syrian context and which resorted to violence and terrorism to achieve political aims was an undesirable precedent. A negotiated solution among the Syrians themselves was indispensable, urgent and necessary.

SAIFUL AZAM MARTINUS ABDULLAH ( Malaysia ), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement and the OIC, said he was "deeply disturbed" by the treatment of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees under unlawful detention by the occupying Power, who had made a "mockery of the rule of law again and again" by declaring itself the only democracy in the Middle East. He condemned Israel's disproportionate use of violence against peaceful protestors, which had resulted in the deaths of several teenagers. Also strongly condemning Israel's ongoing settlement activities, he said, "we should not fool ourselves" into believing that Israeli settlers were "innocently exploring untaken plots of land and untapped resources, seeking a brighter and more virtuous future".

The "harsh reality", he said, was that those illegal settlers had consistently engaged in violence and harassment towards Palestinians, and stolen precious resources, such as olive trees and water. The presence of arms in many settler homes was deeply disturbing and represented "another armed front" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In East Jerusalem, where "Judaization" measures were exposing the "true nature" of Israel's illegal acts, Palestinian homes were being demolished and in their place, Israeli houses would soon be erected. That was "structural, if not ethnic, cleansing". Regarding the Gaza blockade, he reiterated that the occupying Power was "literally taking away the building blocks" of the peace process and "starving the population to death". In Syria, he believed that a political solution was still achievable.

GRETA GUNNARSDOTTIR ( Iceland ) said that in the case of Syria and the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Council had not lived up to its responsibility. She supported the sentiments expressed by United Nations agency heads in the 15 April article in *The New York Times*, in which they demanded that the Council use its influence to save the Syrian people and the region from disaster. The Council did not have the luxury to wait while Syria was destroyed before the eyes of the world. A political solution must be found. Of the 500,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, 400,000 were in need of humanitarian aid, 200,000 were internally displaced and 40,000 had fled to Lebanon where the situation in the Palestinian camps was very difficult. That turn of events should be a wake-up call for the international community on the urgency of finding a just, lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees. The Syrian civil war had also drawn attention to the unresolved question of the occupied Syrian Golan, which required a Council action plan in the light of recent events on the ground.

She also called attention to the increasing number of deaths and injuries caused by the Israeli forces and continued settler violence. She highlighted the continued construction of illegal settlements and the high number of arrests, interrogations and ill treatment by Israel of Palestinian children. She urged the Palestinians to reinforce their reconciliation efforts, calling on the Council to take a more active role in solving the Israel-Palestine conflict. It should visit the State of Palestine, reaffirm the illegality of the settlements, and accept the State of Palestine's application for full United Nations membership in light of the Organization's overwhelming support for the Palestinian's right to self-determination. She reiterated Iceland's call to the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court and to reach a common position on how to address the civil war and its humanitarian consequences.

DESRA PERCAYA ( Indonesia ), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement and the OIC, expressed concern at the "absence of progress" in the conflict. Attempts to resume dialogue had failed so far, but he was encouraged by recent efforts to revive the path of peace. He "fervently supported" a two-State solution, but Israeli policies, especially continued settlement activity, remained an "intractable obstacle". Settlement compounded the problem of fragmentation and signalled a complete lack of commitment to engaging the Palestinians in fair and realistic negotiations. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remained debilitating, owing to Israel's blockade, and he urged it to stop "ignoring and defying relevant United Nations resolutions and international law", which it had done "without repercussion or consequence".

He said he was discouraged that there had only been one positive development for the Palestinian cause in the preceding year, namely its admission to the United Nations as a non-member observer State, following which, Israel had taken "extreme retaliatory measures". The detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, was also troubling and another example of Israel's "disregard for international law". Efforts must be consolidated to halt those violations. The humanitarian situation in Syria had evolved without a proper international response, including by the Council. Regional stability was threatened, and Council members must put aside their differences to find the best way to halt the violence and initiate a political process leading to a solution to the conflict in line with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

MANIEMAGEN GOVENDER ( South Africa ), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement, said that today's debate had been a "talk shop" where Member States restated their known positions, while the Palestinian people continued to suffer. He expressed hope that Israel's new coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, would remove all obstacles to the peace process, specifically ceasing settlement construction, which remained a "stumbling block" to peace. He was concerned that Israel continued to confiscate Palestinian Territory and isolate East Jerusalem from other Palestinian cities, thereby threatening the viability of a two-State solution. He condemned all acts of violence "regardless of where it comes from" and expressed particular concern at the uprooting of olive trees and the demolition of Palestinian homes, churches and mosques.

Recalling Israel's recent announcement to restart the transfer of withheld funds, he said that, aside from violating the Oslo Accords, the withdrawal of those funds was immoral and illegal, and undermined the Palestinian Authority. He urged Israel to lift all restrictions on trade and any other barriers to economic development, as only sustained economic growth could address the needs of the Palestinian people and lift them out of poverty. Expressing deep concern over the illegal detention of Palestinians in Israeli jails, he deplored the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyah, which could have been avoided had it not been for the neglect of Israeli authorities. Citing the UNICEF report, he expressed concern at the human rights violations of Palestinian children and their psychological effects. He called for an end to the illegal and "man-made" blockade of Gaza and for increased international efforts to alleviate the plight of the Palestinian people. The future of Palestine was highly dependent on the unity of its people, and he implored Hamas and Fatah to work together to consolidate Palestinian gains.

CHARLES T. NTWAGAE ( Botswana ), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the "Middle East of yester year is completely different from the Middle East we know now". The region had undergone rapid socioeconomic and cultural transition as part of globalization. Regarding Syria, he expressed concern about the continued perpetration of violence and the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation, which now had the potential to turn into a "humanitarian catastrophe". He strongly condemned the attacks perpetuated against innocent civilians, in particular, women and children, and called on the Security Council to "live up" to its obligations. "How long will we remain bystanders when fellow human beings continue to be subjected to indignity and massacred by the very people who purport to have their interests at heart?", he asked.

On the question of Palestine, he said Botswana continued to support a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living "side by side" in peace as two sovereign States. He hoped they would not only share a border, but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity. Hence, it was imperative that both parties respect all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. He also encouraged them to "get down" to the negotiating table, and specifically urged Israel to cease construction of settlements and enable the negotiation process to proceed free of intimidation and pressure.

YAŞAR HALİT ÇEVİK (Turkey) said that the Middle East had recently experienced a significant period of transition and change, at the heart of which lay the Palestinian situation, which continued to "poison peace" in the region. He reiterated his support for a two-State solution based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital. The revival of the peace process had become increasingly crucial. In that regard, he appreciated the renewed engagement of the United States' Administration. However, Israel's illegal settlement activities presented serious obstacles to the resumption of negotiations. The treatment of Palestinian prisoners also threatened to forestall the peace process. The illegal blockade of Gaza was "not sustainable" and he expected Israel to lift arbitrary border closings, which were counterproductive to what "we are trying to achieve".

Concerning Syria, he said the situation there was fast becoming the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, with more than 70,000 people dead, 1.3 million refugees, 4.5 million people displaced and 6 million people in need of urgent aid. The international community had a "moral obligation" to support the Syrian people. The average number of daily crossings to neighbouring countries had reached 8,000; it was not realistic to expect countries in the region to deal with that. It was timely to begin a discussion and explore viable options for Syrians who wanted to leave their country. The Syrian National Coalition had a vision of a democratic Syria, which was encouraging only if the international community united behind it.

YOUSSEF LARAB (Qatar) said the continued failure of the peace process was due to the international community's failure to deal with its root causes. However, a window of opportunity remained open. Arab countries were keen on the Arab Peace Initiative, which had been on the table for over a decade, but intensified efforts were needed to implement it. Participants at the Arab League Summit in Doha had agreed to form a ministerial committee, headed by Qatar's Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was critical to put pressure on Israel, especially in connection with its settlement policies. It should also be held to its agreements on prisoners.

He said that the situation in Syria was deteriorating and the Government was losing control on the ground, but it nevertheless insisted on remaining in power. It was trying to impose a military solution on its people, using excessive force and perpetrating massacres against them, thereby ignoring its legal and moral responsibilities to protect them. Government forces had targeted civilians and holy areas, along with refugees, schools, places of worship and historical and archaeological buildings. The regime had lost its legitimacy and was committing crimes against humanity—which meant, he stressed, "against us all"—and that "should be a source of shame on the human conscience". The most dangerous reports were those pointing to the use of chemical weapons. The fact-finding committee would be important and its investigations could have significant repercussions.

United Nations humanitarian officials had described Syria as the worst humanitarian crisis globally, he said, grateful for pledges made by Governments, but concerned that the situation was deteriorating faster than the international community's ability to respond. The crisis was spreading and threatening the region as a whole, and the longer the international community remained reluctant to support the Syrian people, the harder it would become to tackle the problem. He refuted the Syrian "lie" that the Government's presence was the only guarantee of safety for minorities. The opposite was true; Syrian society was, in fact, threatened by the regime.

He said that the Arab League had exerted efforts to resolve that urgent crisis, and expressed support for unifying the Syrian opposition in the National Coalition. The United Nations should support the League's efforts, under the Charter's Chapter VIII, in its capacity as the regional organization charged with addressing the Syria crisis. Qatar had submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly, which sought a political solution to the crisis, but it remained of the utmost importance that Security Council was unified and active. Failure to take a position by the Security Council, as well as continued failure to deal with the Palestinian cause, had dangerous repercussions for the Middle East as a whole.

MARÍA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua), endorsing the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, said it was more important than ever to rectify the injustice of the occupation. She had supported the Assembly resolution to upgrade Palestine's status, as, since the 1980s, Nicaragua had fully recognized Palestine as a State. It was a lack of political will on the part of Council members that had prevented Palestine from assuming full United Nations membership. The veto remained the main obstacle to peace and security, and the Council should consider favourably that request. She looked forward to sitting alongside Palestine when it became the 194<sup>th</sup> Member State. As a reprisal for Palestine's success at the General Assembly, Israel had stepped up its occupation policies, tightening the blockade, advancing settlement construction and refusing to remove existing ones. It continued to impose conditions on negotiations while trying to alter the geography and demography of the Palestinian State.

She said that Israel also occupied Lebanese and Syrian territory, adding that peace should include all countries. Palestinian refugees had the right to return to their home country, and Israel should comply with all resolutions in that regard. She expressed solidarity with prisoners, especially the women and children who suffered inhumane treatment, and called for the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained prisoners. It was time to end the double standards applied by some permanent Council members. In Syria, instead of promoting dialogue, they were promoting violence by helping to militarize the conflict by arming extremist groups to achieve regime change. The same members delayed efforts to achieve a Palestinian State, despite the fact that such recognition would lead to the just and lasting peace so vitally needed in the Middle East.

JAMAL AL ROWAIEI (Bahrain) reaffirmed his strong position on the Israel-Palestine issue, saying efforts to achieve peace required that East Jerusalem was the capital of any Palestinian State. He demanded the lifting of the illegal "siege" of Gaza, arguing that that would ease human suffering. A new approach to the peace process was needed to ensure achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Israel was not fulfilling its obligations; in particular, settlement activity must end. Israel should also withdraw from all territories it occupied in 1967 to allow for the peaceful establishment of an independent Palestine. The right of return for refugees should also be guaranteed.

He hailed the Arab Peace Initiative as the best route to Middle East peace, and he reaffirmed his call for Israel to reverse its settlement policy, which was the main impediment to peace. The Security Council and the Quartet should exert all efforts to ensure that the international community exited the historical crisis in a manner that ensured preservation of international peace and security.

XAMER LASSO MENDOZA (Ecuador), associating with the Non-Aligned Movement, said it was important to struggle for a just international system, but he wondered what role the United Nations should play in that system. It was essential "now more than ever" to ensure that international law was implemented and that illegal activities were prevented. Last November, 138 Member States had voted in favour of Palestinian statehood, a feat that represented progress in the efforts for peace and enhanced Palestine's ability to meet its own political needs. Yet, for far too long, Israel's violations of international law had been met with "immunity" and "impunity". Rather than recognize Palestine as United Nations Observer State, the Israeli Government continued its efforts in the occupied West Bank.

Furthermore, the demolition of houses had provoked the displacement of Palestinians to neighbouring countries, undermining the peace process in the region. He condemned Israel's withholding of revenue of the Palestinian Authority, which went against the Oslo Accords. International law must be applicable to all States. He called on the Security Council to "leave this passive attitude" of Israel's abuses behind because it had the danger of becoming complicit. He called on the international community to support the request of Palestine to be recognized as a full-fledged Member State in the United Nations, based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

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