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Sixty-ninth year

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Friday, 18 July 2014, 10.00 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gasana

(Rwanda)

<i>Members</i>	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Mr. Omaish
	Lithuania	Mr. Baublys
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting. I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with

the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

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

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: As we meet today, the intensification of the violence the United Nations was trying so hard to head off is becoming a reality in and around Gaza. This is all the more dismaying as it comes so soon after signs of hope had emerged, specifically the attempt by Egypt to broker a ceasefire, followed by the United Nations brokering of a humanitarian pause. For five hours yesterday, a temporary ceasefire, mostly respected by all parties, allowed civilians in Gaza to resume some vital activities to sustain their daily lives. The pause allowed workers to start some repairs on essential electrical and water infrastructure. In Israel, civilians were largely spared rocket fire for the same period.

The Secretary-General was therefore alarmed when militants resumed the firing of projectiles out of the Gaza Strip after the expiration of the lull, frustrating our hopes that the humanitarian pause would be the beginning of de-escalation. It pains us that the much-needed reprieve was so short.

Shortly after the rockets fired into Israel marked the end of the humanitarian pause, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced the launch of a ground operation into Gaza. To our knowledge, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has so far conducted four ground incursions into Gaza and conducted some 90 air strikes, firing 91 missiles, mostly inside the access restricted area, which has been extended to 3 kilometres. The IDF at the barrier fired some 357 tank shells, while the Israeli Navy fired some 150 shells. Since the end of the humanitarian pause, militants have fired some 127 rockets and 29 mortar shells at Israel. Approximately 20 Palestinian houses were hit. Some 26 Palestinians were killed and another 116 injured. One IDF soldier was killed.

The Secretary-General is extremely concerned that this escalation will further increase the already appalling death toll among Gazan civilians. Israel has legitimate security concerns and we condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza into Israel that ended yesterday's temporary ceasefire, but we are alarmed by Israel's heavy response. The Secretary-General was shocked by the terrible killing by an Israeli strike of four children on a beach in Gaza City on 16 July. Three more children from one family were killed yesterday. No further illustration is needed. The violence must end.

Since 8 July when hostilities intensified in the lead-up to the current escalation, over 2,000 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, of which some 1,100 struck Israel and hundreds were intercepted by the Iron Dome. Two Israelis were killed, including one civilian. Twelve IDF soldiers and 365 Israeli civilians were injured. In the same period, some 261 Palestinians, a majority of them civilians, including at least 48 women and over 50 children, have been killed, and over 1,600 have been injured, as a result of some 1,900 strikes on Gaza from land, air and sea. Israeli bombardment inflicted damage to schools, health facilities and water and sanitation infrastructures. Over 1,800 Palestinian families have had their homes destroyed or severely damaged.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Secretary-General has urged regional and international partners to exert all possible influence to bring about an immediate end to the suffering and bloodshed. Since the last briefing (see S/PV.7214) to the Council on 10 July, the Secretary-General has been in touch around the clock with world leaders to facilitate united and effective action to stop the violence in and around Gaza and the unbearable stress on Israeli families from continued rocket attacks. We had hoped that the successful brokering of a humanitarian pause would also help efforts led by Egypt to facilitate a ceasefire on the basis of the understanding of November 2012. The United Nations has repeatedly expressed our support for all efforts to put an end to the violence. We appreciate that Israel accepted the Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire. However, Hamas tabled counterproposals to the Egyptian proposal that were in turn not acceptable to Israel.

The Palestinian Authority has also expressed its support for a ceasefire, and President Abbas has been actively engaged with regional and world leaders in an appeal for an end to the crisis. President Abbas met with Egyptian President Al Sisi in Cairo yesterday to discuss the Egyptian proposal. Both Presidents reportedly agreed on the necessity of an immediate ceasefire and on the urgency of holding a donors conference to start rebuilding the Gaza Strip. President Abbas is now scheduled to arrive in Turkey today for meetings with Turkish President G  ll and Prime Minister Erdogan to discuss the situation.

President Abbas has also reportedly indicated that, in the event of a ceasefire, he would be willing to redeploy Palestinian Authority forces along the Philadelphi corridor, between Gaza and Egypt, to enable a reopening of the Rafah border crossing under their supervision. That would be a key component of bringing Gaza back under one legitimate Palestinian Government, adhering to the Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments and enabling that Government to deliver tangible improvements to the lives of Gazans. President Abbas has further written to the Secretary-General requesting that Palestine be placed under an international protection system administered by the United Nations. The Secretary-General is carefully studying that request.

The international community, including this Council, has issued numerous calls for an end to violence and for the protection of civilians. We again call for an immediate end to the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas into Israel and Israeli retaliatory action. All parties must respect international humanitarian and human rights law. They must be held accountable for any breaches of those obligations. We also again ask parties to do their utmost to ensure that humanitarian assistance continues to reach all those in need. All must ensure the protection of civilians and the integrity of United Nations premises and staff. In that regard, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has strongly condemned those responsible for placing approximately 20 rockets in a vacant UNRWA school in the Gaza Strip as a flagrant violation of the inviolability of its premises under international law. The Agency has launched a comprehensive investigation into that incident.

A ceasefire is indispensable and urgent. Until efforts to that end succeed, further humanitarian pauses will remain necessary, and we urge the parties to consider such windows so that civilians can move freely and undertake vital activities. The United Nations in Gaza has been a crucial provider of emergency assistance to alleviate the humanitarian impact of the escalation. UNRWA has been playing a lead role in providing shelter in 43 different facilities to around 47,000 Gazans who have nowhere else to flee following IDF warnings to leave their houses before they come under attack. UNRWA's capacity is stretched to the limit, raising fears that further civilians warned of IDF operations could not be accommodated in terms of supplies.

Unless we address the root causes of the current escalation, this dreadful violence will recur again and again. We cannot return to the status quo ante — a concern that Palestinians and Israelis share. Core elements of resolution 1860 (2009) remain unimplemented. Once calm is restored, it is imperative to immediately tackle the underlying causes. These include an end to weapons smuggling, the full opening of the crossings and bringing Gaza back under one legitimate Palestinian Government adhering to the PLO commitments.

As for the latter, it is imperative to address the issue of governance. Tens of thousands of employees hired after 2007 and working in Gaza are not getting paid, while over 60,000 employees continue to receive salaries from Ramallah without performing the essential governance functions that Gaza so urgently needs. That is simply not sustainable. The United Nations remains prepared to help facilitate all efforts in that regard, in coordination and consultation with all concerned parties. The parties must seize this opportunity to not only renew a ceasefire but also to support durable political, security, institutional and socioeconomic progress that stabilizes Gaza.

As the Secretary-General has noted, the impact of the Gaza crisis is starting to be felt within the region. We would also note that since the 9 July meeting of the Council on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), at least 11 rockets were launched from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations towards Israel in five separate incidents between 11 and 18 July. According to the information available so far, five rockets hit Israel, while four fell inside Lebanon and two into the sea. In addition, on 11 July the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) found and dismantled two rockets set to launch towards Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces retaliated on all occasions with several rounds of artillery or illumination fire across the Blue Line towards the launching areas. No casualties or significant damage have been reported from either side so far.

In each instance, UNIFIL immediately engaged with the IDF and the LAF to urge them to exercise maximum restraint and cooperate with UNIFIL in order to prevent further escalation and restore the cessation of hostilities. The Lebanese security forces announced the arrest of three people in connection with the 11, 13 and 14 July attacks. UNIFIL, in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, is maintaining an enhanced operational presence on the ground and has intensified patrols across the area of operations to prevent further incidents. The Lebanese Armed Forces have increased their presence in the area.

On a different front, recent violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria have shown the grave danger that the security situation continues to pose to stability in the Golan. On three occasions this month, explosions and rockets from the Bravo side impacting on the Alpha side led the IDF to respond with fire to the Bravo side. In a very recent development, on 15 July Syrian Arab Armed Forces troops with heavy weapons deployed in proximity to United Nations observation position 56. The exchange of fire between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and armed members of the opposition resulted in mortar rounds impacting in the vicinity of the position. Subsequently, armed members of the opposition approached United Nations observation position 68 demanding that United Nations peacekeepers ask the Syrian Arab Armed Forces to move away from position 56, failing which they would attack position 68.

The threat by armed members of the opposition was repeated today, when a United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) patrol escorting a logistic convoy from positions 60 to 68 was intercepted and armed members of the opposition handed UNDOF a written notice threatening to attack operating position 56 if

the Syrian Arab Armed Forces did not vacate. As we speak, the Syrian Arab Armed Forces remain 30 metres to the north and 200 metres to the south of observation position 56. Position 56 is a communications hub for all United Nations positions south of it. Those developments seriously threaten the safety and security of United Nations personnel and have the potential to jeopardize the ceasefire between Israel and Syria.

While we focus on Gaza today, we must not forget the bigger picture. The escalation in Gaza has also had repercussions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as clashes have occurred between those demonstrating in support of Gaza and the Israeli security forces. Since this morning, restrictions have been placed on Palestinian access to the holy places in the Old City of Jerusalem, and Israeli security forces are heavily deployed. Reported clashes since have led to several Palestinians being injured. In addition, tensions persist, including from settler violence, putting a strain on the much-needed security coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces. Our appeal stands to the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to defuse tensions and act responsibly.

The situation on the ground is ultimately the result of a collective failure to advance a political solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Temporary fixes will no longer do. The international community must assume its responsibility to urgently help restore a serious prospect for a two-State solution that will bring an end to the decades-long conflict and occupation. That is the only way to make a ceasefire last. It is the only way to break the seemingly endless cycle of attack and retaliation. It is the only way to ensure a durable peace for this and succeeding generations of Palestinians and Israelis.

The Secretary-General is prepared to do his part. He will leave for the region tomorrow to express solidarity with Israelis and Palestinians and to help them, in coordination with regional and international actors, to end the violence and to find a way forward.

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

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

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We have called for this emergency meeting of the Security Council due to the ongoing crisis faced by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. With every moment that passes, the life of another Palestinian child, mother or father is cruelly taken by the Israeli occupying forces in their murderous rampage of airstrikes and artillery bombardment against civilian areas, and now a massive ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, threatening the safety and survival of the entire Palestinian civilian population. As we were driving to this meeting, four more children were killed. I have their names and their ages, which range from 2 to 13 years: Rizeq Al-Hayek, aged 2, Sarah Bustan, aged 13, Imad Ilwan, aged 7, and Qasem Ilwan, aged 4.

Despite the regional and international efforts to bring an end to the violence and bloodshed, as well as the siege, isolation and punishment of our people, and the broad consensus that there is no military solution to this crisis or to the conflict in its entirety, Israel, the occupying Power, has intensified its military operations with the full intention and knowledge that the number of civilian casualties will mount. In less than 24 hours, the Israeli assault has killed more than 40 Palestinians, including many children.

While President Abbas has been continuously engaged in efforts to secure a comprehensive ceasefire, including those of Egypt and Turkey, among other concerned countries in the region and beyond, Israel has instead chosen to continue waging war on our people. At the direct command of the highest levels of the Israeli Government and army, the occupying forces are killing and injuring hundreds of Palestinian civilians, the majority of whom are children and women, destroying homes and infrastructure and displacing thousands of families. Yet another disaster is being inflicted on Gaza. It is traumatizing and terrorizing the entire population, worsening the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's repeated aggressions and illegal eight-year blockade and sowing widespread distress, resentment and rage among our people.

That savage Israeli aggression cannot be justified by any means. It is not self-defence but a vengeful military aggression, intentionally planned and perpetrated by the occupying Power against the civilian population under its occupation. Among the goals of that military campaign are the destruction of Palestinian unity and the collapse of the national consensus Government. The statements made by Israeli officials, from the Prime Minister down, as well as the enumeration of the specific aims of the aggression, are clear evidence of that.

We recall that the Israeli Government cynically used the killing of three Israeli settlers to launch the aggression — a crime of which there has not been an independent and transparent investigation but which Israel has insanely used as the basis for its barbaric attacks and because of which officials, settlers and extremists continue to incite more terror and cause harm to our people.

Moreover, it is an obvious repeat of the numerous crises fabricated by Israel over the years to evade all efforts to advance a peaceful political solution to the conflict and to justly address its root causes, namely, Israel's denial and violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people and its 47-year illegal military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land. It is not by coincidence that such deliberate destabilization of the situation on the ground diverts international attention from Israel's obstruction of peace efforts, particularly through its malicious settlement campaign throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

War crimes, crimes against humanity, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations are being committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. That is not simply a Palestinian narrative. It is fact. Before the eyes of the world, Israel wages war against a defenceless civilian population, tramples their human rights, commits grave breaches of international humanitarian law and destroys the pillars of the international system. At the same time, it forces a repugnant double standard on the international community through its cynical pretexts, including by destroying the credibility of the Security Council itself, which continues to stand aside as Israel flagrantly violates its resolutions without consequences.

Israel's actions belie its words. The facts speak much louder than the disdainful words and immoral lectures made repeatedly before the Council by the Israeli representative while his Government and army kill and maim innocent children, women and men. The Palestinian death toll now stands at more than 274 people, plus the four children, making a total of 278 people killed and more than 2,065 people injured. The overwhelming majority of those killed and injured are civilians, including 66 children and, as we heard from Mr. Feltman, 48 women and 17 elderly persons. More than 47,000 people have been displaced, the majority of whom are Palestine refugees. Those disturbing facts are corroborated by reports from the United Nations agencies on the ground, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The images of the Palestinian children killed by the Israeli occupying forces sear our hearts and the conscience of the world. I am compelled to share the names of the some of the children, families and elderly and disabled persons killed by Israel's onslaught since our last appeal to the Council (see S/PV.7214), the majority of whom were killed in Israeli airstrikes on their homes. All the victims, including our children and women, have names. They are not only numbers that the Israeli occupying army slaughters as it wishes. The names are as follows.

Mahmoud Al-Haj, Tariq Saad Al-Haj, Saad Mahmoud Al-Haj, Omar Al-Haj, Najla Mahmoud Al-Haj, Amina Al-Haj, all of the same family, were obliterated. Abdullah Abu Ghazi, aged 4, Yasmeen Al-Mutaweq, aged 4, Shand Helmi Al-Qarnawi, aged 5, Ghalia Deeb Ghannam, aged 7, Nour Marwan Al-Najdi, aged 10, Saber Sukkar, aged 80, and Ola Washahi, aged 31, and Suha Abu Saada, aged 47, both of whom suffered from severe mental and physical handicaps, were killed in an airstrike on a disabled persons centre.

Eighteen members of the Al-Batsh family, including six children and three women, one of them pregnant, were massacred and 16 other civilians were wounded by the Israeli occupying forces in a military airstrike that was deliberately launched on their home and which Israel declared was targeting Tayseer Al-Batsh, a police chief in Gaza. The dead include Nahed Na'im Al-Batsh, aged 41, Bahaa Majed Al-Batsh, aged 28, Qusai Issam Al-Batsh, aged 12, Mohammed Issam Al-Batsh, aged 17, Ahmed Nu'man Al-Batsh, aged 27, Yehya Ala Al-Batsh, aged 18, Jalal Majed Al-Batsh, aged 26, Mahmoud Majed Al-Batsh, aged 22, Marwa Majed Al-Batsh, aged 25, Majed Subhi Al-Batsh, Khaled Majed Al-Batsh, aged 20, Ibrahim Majed Al-Batsh, aged 18, Manar Majed Al-Batsh, aged 13, Amal Hasan Al-Batsh, aged 49, Anas Alaa Al-Batsh, aged 10, Qusai Alaa Al-Batsh, aged 20, Zakariya Alaa Al-Batsh and Aziza Youssef Al-Batsh, aged 59.

Ismail Baker, aged 9, Ahmed Baker, aged 10, Mohammed Baker, aged 10, and Zakariya Baker, aged 10, were murdered by the occupying forces in broad daylight as they were playing on the beach in Gaza City, in the incident that was referred to by Mr. Feltman. Yasmin Al-Astal, aged 4, Osama Al-Astal, aged 6, and Raqiyya Al-Astal, aged 70 - all members of the same family - were killed in an air strike at a mosque. Ibrahim Ramadan Abu Daqqa, aged 10, his brother Amro Ramadan Abu Daqqa, aged 25, and their sister Madeline Abu Daqqa, aged 27, a pregnant mother of three, and their elderly grandmother, Khadra Abu Daqqa, Fulla Shuhaibar, aged 9, brothers Jihad Issam Shuhaibar, aged 10, and Wasim Issam Shuhaibar, aged 7, Ahmad Ismail Abu Musafam, aged 14, his sister Alaa, aged 13, and brother Muhammad, aged 15, Rahaf Khalil Al-Jbour, aged 4, Yassin Al-Humaidi, aged 4, Mohammad Shadi Natiz, aged 15, and Mohammed Salim Natiz, aged 4, and Fares Al-Mahmoud, 5 months old, also died.

We join our grieving people in praying for their souls and asking for strength and resilience for their mourning families and nation.

The names of many of the dead are still unknown as emergency personnel sift through the rubble and as Israel continues its attacks. That is the unjust reality in which the Palestinian people are struggling to survive and suffering gravely under the Israeli occupation, as their right to reject and resist that immoral, inhumane and illegitimate occupation - and their legitimate aspirations to realizing their rights and freedom - continue to be shamefully perverted by the occupying Power.

That reality is worsened by the repeated appeasement of Israel and the failure of the international community to hold it accountable and to impose the rule of law. We call on the Security Council once again to uphold its duties under the Charter and to act forthwith to implement its resolutions regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and children in armed conflict.

Should the Security Council fail to respond to our appeals to uphold the law to end those crimes and violations against our people and ensure their protection, and should our peaceful, diplomatic and political efforts in that regard fail, we will have no recourse but to turn to the judicial bodies of the United Nations and the international system. We have a duty to our people to leave no stone unturned as we strive to end the Israeli occupation, oppression and colonial domination and attain our inalienable rights.

We call on the Security Council to adopt a resolution that condemns the Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, calls for its immediate cessation and the lifting of the Israeli blockade on Gaza Strip, and for protection of the Palestinian people, since Israel, the occupying Power, has clearly abrogated its legal obligations to do so. In that regard, we draw attention to the fact that such a resolution and the necessary action to implement it has the full endorsement of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement, which constitutes the majority of the United Nations membership.

Lastly, before concluding, I also wish to make an appeal to the international community to support the efforts to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza in order to alleviate the grave suffering and devastation they are enduring. In that regard, we appeal for urgent donor support to the emergency appeal for Gaza launched by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on 14 July, recognizing the vital role being played by the Agency, along with other United Nations agencies and international organizations on the ground, to address the crisis and meet the needs of the population.

Finally, allow me to say just a few words in Arabic to our people in the Gaza Strip.

(spoke in Arabic)

We return to the Security Council once again after it failed to respond to the aggression against our people. From this Chamber, we salute the Palestinian people for their suffering and magnificent fortitude and bow before their martyrs who have fallen as a result of Israel's barbaric act of aggression that has spared no civilian woman, man or child in the 1.8 million people living in Gaza. They are right to be angry at the Security Council, which has not stopped that act of aggression. They are right to be angry that the world watches as they suffer and lose their children and members of their families.

That aggression has not yet stopped. However, people across the world are proud of the Palestinian people as they struggle and spare no effort to attain their freedom and put an end to that barbaric act of aggression. We all know that the Palestinian people will succeed, and soon, in putting an end to the barbaric act of aggression.

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

Mr. Prossor (Israel): In the face of terrorists kidnapping our children, we were left with no choice. In the face of rockets raining down on our citizens, we were left with no choice. In the face of jihadists tunneling under our borders, we were left with no choice.

A few hours ago, the Israel Defense Forces entered Gaza to restore sustained quiet to the people of Israel while degrading Hamas' terror capabilities. We did everything in our power to avoid that. Prime Minister Netanyahu made the courageous decision to accept every ceasefire offered, even as the people of Israel were under attack. But Hamas rejected every overture to restore the quiet. That was not what we wanted. We have sent our children — our sons and our daughters — to face an enemy that lives by violence and celebrates death.

I want to be clear. Our forces are fighting in Gaza but they are not fighting the people of Gaza. For years, the citizens of Israel have been the victims of unrelenting attacks perpetrated by a murderous terrorist group. Hamas has attacked us in our homes and our schools and on our buses. The Council should stand now with Israel to prevent the next barrage of rockets, the next kidnapping, and the next suicide attack, so that we may once and for all remove the threat of terrorism casting its dark shadow over the people of Israel.

The past month alone offers a glimpse into the unrelenting threats that Israel faces. We are being attacked on four fronts. Rockets have been launched from Syria, Lebanon and Sinai, and over 1,500 rockets have been fired by terrorists in Gaza. Israel's great restraint is being met with unrestrained aggression. For six hours on Tuesday, Israel held its fire. During that time, the world witnessed Hamas' understanding of ceasefires. Israel ceases and Hamas fires. Hamas did not fire one or two rockets; it battered Israel with 50 rockets. Every one sent a message loud and clear that Hamas is determined to wage war on the Jewish State.

Two days later, the United Nations asked for a limited humanitarian truce. Once again, Prime Minister Netanyahu agreed and proved that Israel is not interested in a war. As aid workers transferred goods to assist the people of Gaza, Hamas continued to defiantly launch rockets into Israel. How did Hamas use the humanitarian ceasefire? It sent 13 heavily armed terrorists through a terror tunnel towards Kibbutz Sufa with the sole purpose of committing a massacre. This is the third time in the past two weeks that Hamas has used its tunnels to infiltrate Israel and tried to carry out attacks. All the while, it is still launching hundreds of rockets.

For 10 days, the life of 5 million Israelis has meant having just seconds to run for a bomb shelter and save their lives. Our largest cities — Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem — are being bombarded on a daily basis. There is no country in the world that would tolerate such an assault on its citizens, and Israel should not be expected to do so either. We are acting solely to defend Israelis from constant terror attacks.

Throughout Operation Protective Edge, Israel has been committed to upholding international law. Our army is a moral army like no other in the world. It does not aspire to harm any innocent person. We are operating only against terrorist targets and genuinely regret any civilian loss. In contrast, there is no red line that Hamas will not cross. It will stop at nothing and there is no depth that it will not sink to. It is even using ambulances filled with children to move its terrorists around Gaza. There is no site that is off limits for Hamas. It is storing its weapons in family homes and launching rockets from mosques, and has established its headquarters in the basement of a Gaza hospital. Yesterday, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) admitted that it had found, mysteriously, 20 missiles in one of its schools. I am sure that if UNRWA took the time to check its other facilities, it would discover that this is just the tip of the iceberg. Hamas is using United Nations facilities to commit a double war crime by targeting Israeli civilians while hiding behind Palestinian civilians. From the safety of their luxury hotels in Qatar, Hamas leaders like Khaled Mashaal order room service with one hand and order Hamas to use Palestinians as human shields with the other.

But Council members do not have to take my word for it. The Palestinian representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council has admitted as much, saying: "The missiles that are now being launched against Israel — each and every missile constitutes a crime against humanity, whether it hits or misses, because it is directed at civilian targets."

I hope the Palestinian representative will remember that when making threats to enter certain United Nations organizations.

Israel has been faced with a choice that no nation should have to make — refrain from responding and subject its civilians to rocket attack, or engage with terrorists and risk injuring civilians. Hamas uses Palestinian casualties to fuel its propaganda machine. Hamas' strategy is clear. It perpetuates the killing of its own people in the hope that the international community will place pressure on Israel to grant its demands.

Sadly, many people have fallen for this cynical campaign by describing the fighting as moral equivalency, or a "cycle of violence". All those who argue that both sides are equally to blame are playing into Hamas' hand and sentencing the people of Gaza and Israel to further suffering. Ill-informed condemnations of Israel strengthen the hand of terrorists. There is a clear difference between Israel and Hamas. The Jewish people believe in the value of life, while Hamas believes in the value of taking lives. How many more Palestinians must fall victim before President Abbas finally breaks his partnership with Hamas? Abbas is the President of the unity Government that includes a murderous terrorist group. What exactly is his Government united for? Obviously, not for peace.

Even as alarms sound throughout Israel, some members of the international community are sounding false alarms here in the United Nations. They told us that as soon as Israel retreated to its 1967 lines and dismantled its settlements, there would be peace. They insisted that the conflict was fueled by the so-called occupation. Occupation? Does no one remember anything?

In 2005, when I headed Israel's foreign service, Israel turned every inch of Gaza over to the Palestinians. In the process, the world watched as we uprooted thousands of families from their homes and dismantled their businesses. When we were done, there was not a soldier, not a settler and not a single Israeli left. All we left behind were greenhouses and other structures that would develop the Gaza economy and allow the Palestinian people to build a peaceful society. We opened border crossings and encouraged commerce because we wanted Gaza to succeed. We hoped that this would serve as a model of two societies living side by side in peace. But it did not. Hamas used the pretense of democracy to create a militant theocracy. First, it waged a civil war against Fatah and executed its political opponents. Then it destroyed the greenhouses and businesses we left behind. Instead of using them to build economic institutions, it built a terrorist regime complete with miles of underground tunnels. Finally, it seized the funding that flowed from the international community to flood Gaza with weapons.

In each and every month for the past nine years, Hamas has fired rockets towards Israeli towns and cities. Over time, it has expanded its arsenal of rockets from a few hundred to thousands. The weapons it has today are more sophisticated and can reach further into Israel than ever before. Every few years, Hamas escalates its attacks by launching a massive offensive. In 2008, over the course of three weeks Hamas fired 800 rockets that could reach a million Israelis living in the area near Gaza. In 2012, Hamas fired 1,200 rockets in a single week that could reach 3.5 million Israelis in southern and central Israel. Over the past two weeks, Hamas has fired 1,500 rockets that threaten 5 million Israelis, or 70 per cent of our population living throughout the country.

After each escalation, the international community brokers a ceasefire and Israel accepts it, hoping that it will finally bring peace. After three rounds of major assaults and over 12,000 rockets in nine years, it has become clear that Hamas is not interested in bringing quiet to Gaza. It is employing the Hudna strategy. When Hamas finds itself on the verge of defeat, it agrees to a brief recess to reset, rearm and resume aggressions.

For years, we have told the Security Council about the thousands of rockets that Hamas was smuggling into Gaza. We have talked and we have repeated these facts. We have been met with silence. Time and again, we have called on the international community to condemn the rocket fire and we have been met with silence. It is time for the international community to face the consequences of its inaction. Hamas used its foothold in Gaza to trample on the Palestinian people and build a terror base in Israel's backyard. Now it sees an opportunity to do so again. Hamas is using the unity Government to export its terrorist capabilities from Gaza to Judea and Samaria. If Hamas is not stopped, it will mean more terror for Israel and more tragedy for the Palestinians.

The international community embraced the unity agreement between Fatah and the terror organization, believing that it would move us closer to peace. Does that sound logical? How could embracing a terror group whose *raison d'être* is the eradication of Israel bring about peace? By now it should be clear that Hamas is using the cover of a political agreement to gain legitimacy for its extremist objectives. Following the establishment of the unity Government, Hamas Minister Fathi Hamad declared that, "the whistling bullets, the sound of bombs and missiles exploding and the capture of Israeli soldiers was music to our ears".

The danger could not be clearer. Supporting the unity agreement gives Hamas the opportunity to weave incitement, violence and terror into the basic fabric of Judea and Samara, just as it did in Gaza.

The citizens of Israel want to live in peace. We want to see our children grow up and grow old without ever having to run for a bomb shelter or put on an army uniform. Our hope is that some day — some day — we will read about attacks on Jewish people in history books, rather than in newspapers. But that day has not yet come. For now, we are forced to wage war against a terrorist group committed to our destruction. As we speak, night has fallen in Israel. Rather than sleeping soundly in their beds, our sons and daughters are out there in the darkness standing guard over Israel and the people of Israel.

In the Book of Psalms, King David says, "Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war" (*The Holy Bible*, Psalm 120:6-7). Israel was left with no choice. But each and every individual in this Chamber has the choice to stand against terrorism and for the right of people to live in peace; to stand against the use of human shields, and for human rights; to stand against oppression and for the freedoms that we hold dear. The leaders of many Governments represented in this Chamber have already expressed their support for Israel's right to defend itself. We thank them for standing by our side at this important hour. I ask the rest of those present to join them.

I have here with me a compass. I offer it to the international community in the hope that it will guide its members towards making the right decision and standing for greater clarity, for good against evil and for right against wrong.

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

Mr. Omaish (Jordan) (spoke in Arabic): Jordan, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, called for the convening of this urgent meeting to discuss the latest grave developments in the Gaza Strip. We thank the members of the Council for responding quickly to our call.

Jordan rejects and condemns in the strongest terms the repeated aggressions waged by Israel on the Gaza Strip. We denounce its war on the Palestinian people and the most recent developments following the launch of the land invasion against the Gaza Strip last night. Jordan denounces the disproportionate, unjustified use of excessive force and the indiscriminate targeting of innocent civilians — the sons and daughters of the Palestinian people. Has humankind become jaded as the world has become accustomed to seeing dead children in Gaza, dead children on the beaches of Gaza and dead children among the remains of their destroyed homes?

Israel's aggression has claimed more than 270 martyrs to date, as well as more than 1,500 injured. The numbers continue to escalate. The United Nations has reported that more than 80 per cent of the Palestinian casualties are civilians. More than 20 per cent are children. More than 1,600 Palestinian homes have been obliterated. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have left their homes in northern and central Gaza. More than 18,000 have sought refuge in the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. More than half of the people of Gaza are living without water. Many schools and health facilities have been destroyed, thereby escalating the suffocating human suffering in the Gaza Strip.

Jordan calls on Israel to immediately end its military operations. We call on Israel to withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip. Jordan calls for a complete de-escalation and ceasefire and an end to the targeting of innocent civilians anywhere, as well as for their protection. We call for respect for the rules of international humanitarian law. In that regard, Jordan supports the Egyptian initiative towards ceasefire and de-escalation, that has been tabled.

Jordan has strengthened the capacity of the military field hospital that has been operating in Gaza for years. We have accelerated urgent medical assistance to the Strip. Jordan has also opened its doors to the waves of Palestinian wounded. We call on the international community to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Under the leadership of his majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, Jordan is working substantively through intensive contacts with the leaders of the region and the world, to reach a ceasefire agreement. We stress that the only solution to guarantee a definitive end to such Israeli aggression would be a political solution through

the resumption of comprehensive, serious negotiations based on the two-State solution. That would include the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian land, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, in order to ensure security and stability for all the States and peoples of the region.

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

The United States is deeply concerned about the rocket attacks by Hamas and by the dangerous escalation of hostilities in the region. In particular, we are concerned about the devastating impact of the crisis on both Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

President Obama spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu this morning to reaffirm the United States strong support for Israel's right to defend itself. As President Obama said today, no nation should accept rockets being fired into its borders or terrorists tunnelling into its territory. In just the last two weeks, Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza have launched more than 1,500 rockets towards population centres in Israel. Hamas attacks are unacceptable, and would be unacceptable to any State Member of the United Nations. Israel has the right to defend its citizens and prevent those attacks.

President Obama also said today that we are deeply concerned about the potential loss of more innocent lives. It is important that everything possible be done to prevent civilian casualties, as well as to mitigate the suffering of innocent men, women and children.

The consequences of the increasing violence are plain for all of us to see, and they are heart-wrenching. We feel profound anguish upon seeing the images of suffering from Gaza, including the deaths and injuries of innocent Palestinian civilians, including young children, and the displacement of thousands of people. Israeli civilians, including the elderly and children alike, are fleeing to shelters with little warnings to escape the barrage of rockets from Gaza. That is no way for anyone to live — not Palestinians, not Israelis.

The four Palestinian boys playing on the beach in Gaza City were like boys everywhere, restless for play. Their deaths are heartbreaking, and the loss their family members and neighbours must feel today must be searing. The Israeli authorities have opened an investigation into their deaths.

The devastating consequences of the conflict make it all the more disturbing that Hamas has squandered the serious efforts by Egypt to broker a ceasefire. A cessation of violence would have offered civilians on both sides a chance for peace, but Hamas continued its rocket attacks.

As we have repeatedly stated, the United States is committed to finding a diplomatic solution to stop the ongoing violence. As President Obama made clear earlier today, we believe there should be a return to the ceasefire that was reached in November 2012. To that end, we are committed to supporting Egypt's ceasefire proposal. That is why Secretary of State Kerry is working with our regional partners to try to bring about a cessation of hostilities, and is prepared to travel to the region following additional consultations.

Until that ceasefire is reached, we need to do everything within our power to assist the civilians caught in the middle of the violence. We are grateful for the five-hour humanitarian pause negotiated by Special Coordinator Serry yesterday. It provided a critically important window for the United Nations, humanitarian and medical workers and others to reach the wounded, displaced and most vulnerable. It allowed time for some crucial infrastructure repairs to improve access to basic services.

And it offered a brief reprieve for some of the people most affected by the conflict.

But let us be clear: a humanitarian pause is just that, a pause. It is a brief stop in an otherwise persistent and often overwhelming stream of violence, which has inflicted suffering and terror on civilians. A pause is no substitute for a ceasefire, which is what is needed.

Indeed, what was already a very troubling humanitarian situation in Gaza is rapidly deteriorating. There are widespread shortages of water, food, electricity and medicine. The United Nations, humanitarian organizations and regular Palestinian citizens are all doing tremendous work to assist those in need — from opening their homes to the displaced to delivering emergency rations to those in the hardest-to-reach places. But the situation is grave and getting worse. Until a ceasefire is reached, we call on all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and to respect and protect humanitarian and medical facilities, including those of the United Nations.

This week, the United Nations in Gaza discovered 20 rockets that had been put in one of its schools. The United Nations quickly removed the rockets and roundly condemned the action. Such tactics are indefensible. We condemn in the strongest terms this immoral, unlawful and dangerous use of schools and hospitals for military purposes, which endangers some of society's most vulnerable members: children and the sick.

No family, Palestinian or Israeli should have to live in perpetual fear of being unsafe in their own homes. No children, Israeli or Palestinian, should be kept awake at night by the sounds of rockets and gunfire, or to be prevented from going to school because it's too dangerous to venture outside. No people want to live like that. It is outrageous that they are being forced to do so.

The only way to end the situation is an immediate cessation of rocket fire from Gaza and a de-escalation in hostilities. That is what we are calling for today.

The recent surge in violence escalated with the kidnapping and senseless murder of three Israeli boys, which was followed by the kidnapping and senseless murder of a Palestinian boy. When news of the Palestinian boy's killing reached the mother of one of the Israeli victims, she said: "No mother or father should go through what we are going through now." She is right. Too much innocent blood has been shed. The suffering of innocent civilians must come to an end.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's emergency meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I listened carefully to the statements by the representatives of Israel and Palestine. China is closely following the recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

In spite of repeated calls by the international community, Israel has continued with its large-scale aerial bombardment against Gaza and has launched a ground invasion into Gaza, resulting in heavy civilian casualties, including women and children. China is deeply concerned and grief-stricken at this development. China condemns all abuse of force, whatever the excuse, and any action that causes heavy casualties among innocent civilians. Instead of solving problems, force leads only to more bloodshed, destruction and hatred.

We are disappointed that the humanitarian pause did not lead to a sustained ceasefire. We urge the parties concerned to immediately cease hostilities, withdraw their ground troops from Gaza, completely lift the blockade against Gaza and give access to United Nations and other international humanitarian aid agencies so as to alleviate the misery of the local population. China supports efforts by the Security Council to adopt the necessary actions, take a firm stand on the Gaza situation, promote an alleviation of tension, prevent more civilian casualties and maintain peace and stability in the Middle East.

China appreciates and supports the diplomatic mediation efforts by the international community, including by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Egypt and other countries of the region and the League of Arab States, to de-escalate the current situation. The imperative at this stage is for the Israeli and Palestinian parties to respond positively to the international community's ceasefire initiative and good offices, immediately achieve a ceasefire and avoid any military ground operations, rocket-firing or other actions that may lead to further escalation and tension.

China is in close contact with the parties concerned to push for an Israeli and Palestinian ceasefire. A Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister just met separately in China with envoys and representatives of Israel, Palestine, Egypt and other Arab countries and the Arab League and is deeply engaged with them. As we speak, the Chinese special envoy on the Middle East is on a shuttle mission of good offices to Israel and Palestine, pushing for peace and dialogue. We will also send a further tranche in humanitarian aid to Palestine to ease the humanitarian difficulties in Gaza. China is ready to maintain communication with the concerned parties, including Arab countries, and will spare no effort in easing the Israeli and Palestinian situation and maintaining peace and stability in the region.

The question of Palestine remains at the core of the Middle East issue. The ongoing stalemate in the Middle East peace process is not conducive to peace and stability in the Middle East region. The re-emergence of conflict in Gaza underscores the importance and urgency of a solution to the Palestinian issue given the current situation in the region. The international community must step up its efforts to bring about constructive initiatives by both sides in order to restore mutual trust, to promptly resume dialogue and to achieve substantial progress. As the dominant force, Israel must take proactive steps and establish the necessary conditions for the relaunching of the peace talks.

China firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also support Palestine's admission to the United Nations and other international organizations.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I want to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

The ground invasion launched by Israel into Gaza has led to a further escalation of the conflict with Hamas. We regret that, despite the calls of well-intentioned leaders around the world for a de-escalation and restraint, the conflict has increased in both intensity and scope. Indeed, this conflict has claimed numerous lives, including those of women and innocent children.

While we recognize Israel's inherent right to protect its citizens from attack, its response must be proportionate to and in accordance with international humanitarian law. The civilian toll on the Palestinian side, especially the killing of women and children, is simply unjustifiable. In the same vein, we urge Hamas to put an immediate end to its indiscriminate rocket attacks, which have terrorized Israelis and disrupted their lives. Violence begets violence and makes reconciliation almost impossible.

We believe that a de-escalation of the conflict is now urgently required. That implies that the leaders of both sides must demonstrate maximum restraint. Countries with an influence on the warring parties should leave no stone unturned to facilitate a return to the ceasefire of November 2012.

It has been established that there can be no military solution to the question of Palestine. The only path to sustainable peace between Israel and Palestine is through negotiations. The doors to a diplomatic resolution must therefore remain open. We urge both parties to embrace dialogue by reviving the stalled peace talks. We reiterate our support for a two-State solution, with both Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

The events that we are witnessing are serious and, unfortunately, not unprecedented. In 2008, 2012 and 2014, on each occasion the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have been caught between the rocket fire that we condemn and the fire of the Israeli army, with all its victims. Each time, the Israeli people have suffered great distress. The history of the Middle East, more than any other region of the world, repeats itself. Once again, we are seeing a deadly spiral and the distancing of a peace that seems increasingly unattainable every time that serious efforts fail. A few weeks ago, we were talking about our support for the peace initiative and dialogue between the parties under the aegis of the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry. Today, history is repeating itself and we are once again at war.

In that context, as the Council and the international community, what should our priorities be? Our immediate and absolute priority must be to achieve a ceasefire. On the one hand, the firing of missiles by Hamas into Israel must cease. It violates international humanitarian law. On the other hand, the Israeli air strikes and ground offensive have already caused too many deaths, those of nearly 300 Palestinians, 80 per cent of whom are civilians, including 40 children.

I recall that, under international humanitarian law, civilians should be protected. It is urgent to stop the spiral of violence and a worsening of the disastrous human toll of the crisis. The French Foreign Minister, Mr. Laurent Fabius, is currently in the region. He has met the Palestinian and the Egyptian authorities, whose mediation efforts we support. Tomorrow, he will meet the Israeli and Jordanian authorities.

France also welcomes the role of the humanitarian agencies in Gaza, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, which are alleviating the suffering and food insecurity of the Palestinian people. Humanitarian teams fulfil a sacred mission and must be able to act in accordance with the needs, with their safety guaranteed.

However, a ceasefire is not enough. We must establish the conditions for a lasting truce that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Israelis and Palestinians, in particular in Gaza — on the one hand, security, which is an absolute right, and, on the other hand, an end to the blockade and economic development, which are essential. Gaza must no longer be the outpost of those who want to destroy Israel or an open-air prison. We call on Hamas, first, to support the proposal for an immediate ceasefire, and then to pave the way for a final agreement by accepting the conditions set by the Quartet, namely, the recognition of Israel, the renunciation of violence and the acceptance of the agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority.

In addition, Gaza must be able to resume a normal way of life, since poverty, despair and inactivity swell the ranks of Hamas rather than weaken it. It is therefore important to work for the lifting of the blockade and the opening of the border crossings, including at Rafah. In that spirit, France has proposed the reimplementation of the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah, which would improve the living conditions of the population and support an effective return of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, it is above all necessary to restore meaning to a political settlement. I have already had the opportunity to say that the key features of such a solution are known. Yet no one is able to implement them. The relaunching and conclusion of the peace process are the only solution that exists. Europeans and Arabs, alongside the Americans, must mobilize themselves in order to effectively provide both parties with the assurances that they need to overcome their fears. Indeed, while that wall of fear continues and the feeling of each party that the other wants its destruction, nothing will be possible. The old formulas have not worked for the 20 years since the Oslo Accords were signed. The two parties are clearly unable to move towards peace by themselves. We need new ideas and the efforts of everyone to help them in that direction, which they are hesitant to take.

Ms. King (Australia): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

Alongside other members of the international community, Australia is deeply concerned about the escalation in hostilities between Israel and the militant groups in Gaza. It is a tragedy that the recent events have led us to that point. It is important that steps are taken to reduce tensions and to restore peace. The decision by Hamas to reject the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire proposals and the continued firing of rockets indiscriminately into Israel are inexcusable. We appreciate all the efforts of a range of actors that have gone into negotiating a ceasefire during the course of the past week.

We welcome the news that the Secretary-General will be travelling to the region tomorrow and we strongly support his diplomatic efforts. We strongly urge all parties to find a peaceful resolution and bring an end to the current violence.

Australia condemns the events that led to the current escalation in the region. The murders of the three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank and the apparent revenge murder of the Palestinian teenager on 2 July were tragic events that should never have taken place. We extend our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and call for the perpetrators of those terrible crimes to be held to account.

Australia calls on all parties to exercise restraint and consider the welfare of the people they represent when taking decisions on next steps. We also call upon the parties to bring the escalation of violence to an end by restoring the November 2012 ceasefire, a call which has been repeated consistently by many members of the international community over recent days and which must be heeded as a matter of urgency. Australia continues to urge both Israel and the Palestinians to resume negotiations toward a just and lasting two-State solution, with Israel and a Palestinian State existing side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. As we all are aware, a just and lasting two-State solution is the only basis for a durable peace between the parties.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Eight days ago we met in urgent consultations to address the situation in Israel and Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, after which we released a statement to the press expressing the deep concern of the members of the Security Council with regard to the crisis.

Unfortunately, the call to reduce tensions and restore the November 2012 ceasefire has fallen on deaf ears. Instead, Israel has escalated the conflict by initiating the ground phase of its military operation, while Hamas and other armed groups continue to reposition and launch rockets from the Gaza Strip. We deplore the lack of a firm commitment of the parties to de-escalate the conflict.

We appreciate the efforts of various regional and international actors who have sought to broker a ceasefire, although we wonder today whether seeking to resume the mediation of previous years is the best option, given the changes that have occurred in the political map of the Middle East. We strongly support the efforts of the Secretary-General and especially those of his Special Coordinator, Mr. Robert Serry, to whom reiterate our support. We wish to formulate an urgent call to establish an immediate ceasefire and protect the civilian population as well as the safety of United Nations personnel. We believe that the attacks on civilians in Gaza and Israel violate international humanitarian law and could constitute war crimes.

In the light of the report yesterday by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, we recall the provisions of resolution 2143 (2014) on children and armed conflict, co-sponsored by my country, and condemn the use of schools for military purposes in violation of applicable international law. As Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos reminded us, this is the third large-scale armed confrontation in the Gaza Strip in the past six years. The conflict has deep roots on which the Security Council has a duty to act.

Mr. Baublys (Lithuania): We sincerely thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his latest briefing on the situation in the region. We are deeply concerned about the dramatic escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and the loss in human lives. We deeply deplore the growing number of civilian casualties, many of whom are children, and we extend our most sincere condolences to the families. It is our greatest concern that the situation could rapidly deteriorate even further, taking more human lives, causing greater numbers of wounded and further increasing the most humanitarian needs in the region, which was already suffering from a chronic lack of basic humanitarian goods.

Lithuania strongly condemns the firing of rockets from Gaza and Hamas' mounting belligerent rhetoric and its tactics involving the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. We join the United Nations and others in strongly condemning the placement of rockets in the school operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We call on Hamas to put an immediate end to those acts and renounce violence. All terrorists and militant groups in Gaza must disarm.

We recognize Israel's right to protect its population from the firing of rockets from Gaza. Nevertheless, we reiterate that in doing so Israel must fully comply international humanitarian law, act proportionately and ensure the protection of civilians at all times. Furthermore, it has to respect its obligations to allow full, unimpeded access to humanitarian aid.

The ceasefire proposed by Egypt was a ray of hope, and we deeply regret that the agreement was short-lived. Once again, we call on both States to immediately stop the violence, de-escalate the situation and return to calm. A humanitarian pause is no substitute.

Lithuania welcomes the ongoing efforts of the international community, the League of Arab States and regional partners, including Egypt, to convince both sides to immediately stop all hostilities and restore the 2012 ceasefire agreement. We urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to commit to an immediate, durable ceasefire and restart the dialogue. Lithuania remains committed to the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I too would like to thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing, and you, Mr. President, for responding quickly to the urgent request and scheduling today's meeting at short notice. As others have already said, the situation on the ground is deeply alarming and of great concern to us all.

The United Kingdom has three objectives: to secure a ceasefire, to alleviate humanitarian suffering and to keep alive the prospects for peace negotiations, which are the only hope of breaking the cycle of violence and devastation once and for all. My Government's position remains clear. We want to see immediate de-escalation and agreement on a durable ceasefire. The people of Israel have the right to live without constant fear for their security. The people of Gaza have the right to live safely in peace. Steps must be taken now to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

We welcome the Egyptian proposed ceasefire. We welcomed Israel's acceptance in principle of the terms of the proposed ceasefire agreement and we welcome the Palestinian Authority's endorsement of the Egyptian initiative. We also welcome the United Nations-facilitated humanitarian pause on 17 July. We call on Hamas and all militant factions in Gaza to cease hostilities, ending all rocket fire into Israel. We utterly condemn the firing of rockets into civilian areas.

Let me reiterate our support for Israel's right to self-defence. Israel faces a tough dilemma in responding to unacceptable rocket fire from Gaza. But in exercising its right to self-defence, Israel must act proportionately and take all necessary steps to minimize civilian casualties. As we have heard this afternoon, many innocent civilians are being killed.

On our second objective, we are deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation. There are hundreds of thousands of extremely vulnerable civilians in Gaza who are suffering acutely from the crisis. Access to clean water, power and medicines is becoming critically difficult. We urge all parties to continue to allow unhindered access throughout Gaza. The United Kingdom's support has enabled United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to respond to the crisis by continuing to provide crucial health services.

On the third objective, any ceasefire needs to be genuinely sustainable. It is important to tackle the underlying causes of instability in the Gaza Strip without which the long-term security of both Israel and Gaza cannot be secured. As part of a ceasefire, we need to consider establishing a viable verification and monitoring mission to ensure the implementation of any ceasefire agreement by all sides, learning lessons from the past.

However, the implementation of a ceasefire agreement must be only one part of a wider effort to improve conditions in Gaza. Without that, we are likely to see further such cycles of violence. That should include the restoration of Palestinian Authority control in Gaza, the opening up of legitimate movement and access, and a permanent end to the unacceptable threat of rocket attacks and other forms of violence from Gaza militants against Israel.

The responsibility lies with both sides to make progress towards a permanent peace, enshrined in a two-State solution. No other alternative option exists that guarantees peace and sustainable security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Chad is following the situation in the Gaza Strip with a great deal of concern. We firmly condemn the new escalation of violence, which has already claimed over 270 lives, including 30 today, more than 2,000 injured, 40,000 displaced persons, most of whom are women and children, as well as thousands of houses destroyed. Chad is outraged by the indiscriminate and overwhelming violence and calls on Israel immediately to put an end to its air raids and ground offensive, all of which are mainly aimed at civilians, educational facilities and hospitals and constitute a very serious violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Chad also urges the Palestinians to put an end to their attacks against Israel originating from the Gaza Strip. That includes the firing of rockets and the cross-border attacks, which we condemn. We urge both sides to exercise restraint in order to rapidly achieve a ceasefire and the lifting of all forms of blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. In that regard, Chad supports the efforts of the international community and the countries of the region to restore peace and put an end to hostilities.

We express our solidarity with the citizens of Gaza and the whole of the Palestinian people during the very difficult and painful times they are currently experiencing. We call upon the entire international community to provide every possible form of support and assistance to the Palestinian people, including medical supplies and emergency aid to the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian question has been on the United Nations agenda for more than 66 years now but the Palestinian people has no glimmer of hope based on the efforts

undertaken to guarantee its rights to self-determination and to put an end to the Israeli occupation.

The current situation in Gaza is a very dangerous one. It is alarming as well. In the face of this, the international community, including the Security Council, must act in a firm and urgent manner to put an end to this unprecedented cycle of violence and to create conditions conducive to peace between Palestinians and Israelis. One and a half million people in Gaza cannot enjoy a normal, dignified life. The blockade imposed upon the Gaza Strip by Israel since 2007, with all borders hermetically sealed, has rendered the daily life of its inhabitants very difficult and unbearable. Almost no one can leave the Gaza Strip even just to visit the West Bank, where a great many have family and have worked in the past. Health facilities are suffering from the restrictions imposed by Israel on the transfer of medical equipment, building equipment and a great many basic goods necessary for their upkeep.

Security-related incidents in the zone between Gaza and Israel often claim human lives and cause the destruction of property and people's means of subsistence. Young people, who make up 50 per cent of the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and have an unemployment rate of nearly 40 per cent, suffer from a lack of any prospects and are carrying out a constant and relentless fight to preserve hope in the future. In those difficult conditions, when the Palestinian population is destitute and oppressed, how can the Palestinians believe in the peace process?

The Middle East is currently going through a very difficult period in its history since a number of regions have already erupted into conflict, in particular in Iraq, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. All of that constitutes a serious threat to international and regional peace and security. The international community must step up its efforts to relaunch the process of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians to achieve a fair, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, one founded on the principle of two States based on the 1967 borders, pursuant to international law and the relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the exchange of land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously concluded between the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Inter-Palestinian reconciliation should not serve as a pretext for Israel to undermine the peace process. Peace negotiations absolutely require political and a suitable environment, as well as mutual confidence-building measures. A people under occupation, whose territory is slowly being eaten up by the illegal building of settlements and who is systematically a victim of aggression, will probably lose all hope in a better future.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): One cannot simply remain unfazed by what is happening. Since the beginning of the Israeli ground military operation, the situation around Gaza has entered a dangerous new spiral of tension. We are extremely alarmed by this turn of events. There is every reason for concern that the scale of the bloodshed will increase substantially.

The most important pressing issue today is to stop the armed conflict, the victims of which are peaceful Palestinian civilians, including women and children. Civilians in both Palestine and Israel need to be rapidly protected from terrorist attacks and the disproportionate use of force.

In its latest statement, on 12 July, the Council, inter alia, called upon the parties to abide by the norms of international humanitarian law. In that regard, we are alarmed by reports of Israeli bombardment of the Al-Wafa rehabilitation centre in Gaza, as well as the Beit Hanoun, Shejaiya and Al-Quds hospitals.

The firing on other civilian objects, including residential houses, is also unacceptable. There are reports today of helicopter strikes on a building housing journalists. At least one of them has been wounded. International humanitarian law also requires the demilitarization of civilian facilities. In that regard, it is with concern that we hear reports that Hamas militants

and other factions in the Gaza Strip are using schools for military purposes, including stockpiling munitions and using them to fire on residential neighbourhoods and civilian facilities in Israel.

We understand Israel's concerns regarding the continuing shelling of its territory from the Gaza Strip. However, it is important to prevent the unleashing of an unending spiral of violence, otherwise the situation will irreversibly spin out of all control.

In those circumstances, we again urge all sides to spare to no effort to rapidly achieve a ceasefire. We welcome and support Egypt's mediation efforts. Cairo's initiative, which Israelis and the central Palestinian Authority have agreed to in principle, could serve as the basis for a ceasefire agreement. Such a truce should not only be long-term, but also ensure that peace and stability is restored for Israelis, dignified living conditions for the population and development for the Gaza Strip. Russia is ready to participate in bilateral and multilateral formats towards finding a solution to the very dangerous crisis in the Gaza Strip. The current crisis must prompt us to assist in the efforts to achieve Palestinian unity.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the Gaza Strip must be under a single, legitimate Palestinian Government that complies with its Palestine Liberation Organization commitments and the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009), as well as with the plan for the normalization of border crossings and further intra-Palestinian reconciliation. At the same time, we underscore that the current serious escalation of the situation should remind us that there is no prospect for the current status quo and of the importance of a substantive negotiations process.

We are convinced that this process must be supported collectively. Even intensive attempts to achieve unilateral results have failed yet again. Now is the time to step up the work of the international Quartet. The representatives of the League of Arab States need to work with the Quartet, and not merely follow its decisions. Work towards a solution must be elaborated jointly with the Arabs — first and foremost with the Egyptians — so to ensure that they are participants in the process to elaborate initiatives.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I too thank Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Recent developments in Israel and Gaza have elicited a terrible sense of déjà vu, mixed with a profound feeling of powerlessness. The déjà vu is that of reprisals following reprisals; ever growing numbers of civilian casualties; the voices of hawks and extremists drowning out the voices of moderates. The powerlessness is that of the international community which, since the end of the Second World War, has continued to experience in the Middle East one of its most serious political and diplomatic failures.

Today, the peace process is at moribund and violence prevails. Today, however, we must reiterate to all of those who are willing to listen — and above all to those who are not — that more war will not lead to more security. War leads to nothing but new tragedies such as that of two days ago which caused the death of a group of children — four brothers who were killed by shelling as they played on a Gaza beach.

The ground offensive just launched by Israel against Gaza has therefore provoked our deepest concern. Certainly, Israel has the right to protect its people from rocket attacks from Gaza, which we condemn, but in so doing Israel must act proportionately while at all times ensuring the protection of civilians. According to the latest information, in 11 days Israeli military operations have produced many Palestinian casualties, including more than 270 dead and nearly 2,000 wounded, the vast majority of whom are civilians. We are particularly shocked by the number of Palestinian children who are victims. As stated by Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, we are facing a crisis involving the protection of children in Gaza.

Let us recall that all parties are fully obligated under international humanitarian law to protect the lives of civilians trapped by hostilities. Naturally, that also applies to Hamas and other militant groups that seek to strike indiscriminately at the heart of Israel's urban centres in order to produce the highest number of civilian casualties. Yesterday, as Mr. Feltman has mentioned, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), discovered rockets that had been hidden in one of its schools in Gaza. It is unconscionable and cynical to jeopardize the lives of children in that way. Effectively, those responsible for such acts and those who are intensifying their calls for the destruction of Israel are deliberately sacrificing the interests of the Palestinian people.

In the short term, all efforts of the international community should focus on the full cessation of hostilities. We deplore the fact that the humanitarian truce proposed yesterday by the United Nations has not led to a lasting ceasefire. We appeal to the parties to de-escalate tensions and to immediately conclude a ceasefire agreement. For its part, Luxembourg fully supports all efforts to end the violence, particularly the initiative of Egypt, whose mediation efforts we take this opportunity to recognize. We welcome the Secretary-General's intention to visit the region and urge him to pursue his efforts towards de-escalation. On the humanitarian front, we reiterate our full support for UNRWA and its crucial role in alleviating, however modestly, the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Ultimately, since war offers no solution, we must give peace a chance. But a chance for peace requires first giving a chance to the peace process. It is imperative that Israelis and Palestinians resume dialogue in order to try to fill the political vacuum prevailing between them today. To end the spiral of violence, the best and only way forward is the resumption of talks seeking a comprehensive agreement in the framework of a two-State solution.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing, and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements. The Security Council cannot remain indifferent before the tragic events taking place between the Gaza Strip and Israel. I therefore take this opportunity to thank you, Sir, for convening this highly important meeting.

Again, for the third time in less than six years, civilians have been caught in the crossfire between Hamas' armed actions and Israel's disproportionate and excessive use of force. Argentina stands in solidarity with the wounded and with the families of the victims in Israel and Palestine.

In response to the situation, on 10 July the Security Council issued a clear call for the de-escalation of violence, the restoration of calm and the reinstitution of the November 2012 ceasefire. It also firmly appealed for respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. At that time, Israel's military operations had killed 114 Palestinians and wounded over 680. One week later, casualties in Gaza had totaled more than 270 dead and 1,800 wounded, most of whom were civilians. The 34,000 internally displaced and more than 1,700 families that had lost their homes complete the picture of destruction and suffering.

We therefore firmly condemn Israel's rejection of appeals on the part of the Council, the Secretary-General and many voices of the international community, and its decision to escalate the crisis by launching a ground offensive. That decision will only generate greater instability in the region, more victims and increased suffering. We also condemn the continued and indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and the militarization of civilian facilities.

Argentina supports the ongoing efforts to end all military operations and to end the bloodshed. We urge both parties to join in the efforts of Egypt and other regional and international actors to establish an immediate and durable ceasefire. We also support the efforts of the Secretary-General. Once calm returns, concrete measures must be taken to end this destructive cycle of violence by addressing the underlying conditions that led to the escalation. It will be necessary to allow unhindered access of humanitarian assistance, to ensure the sustained and regular flow of goods and people through the border crossings, and once and for all to realize the pressing political need for a single and effective Palestinian Authority governing all Palestinian territory and speaking on behalf of all its people. It would therefore be regrettable for the current situation to be used to undermine the unity Government in Palestine, which is widely recognized and supported by those seeking peace in the region. More broadly, these tragic events have once again highlighted the urgent need for the parties to resume a process of genuine negotiations, based on internationally accepted standards, so that the solution of two States living in peace can be achieved. There is no substitute for dialogue and negotiation to translate that vision into a reality. Achieving that goal must remain our priority.

Argentina believes that the Security Council must resume its function of playing a decisive role in this situation. If our initial message was not heard, it may be time to speak up louder and with one voice to demand, with all the tools at our disposal, an end to hostilities and respect for international law. Argentina is ready to do its part to ensure that the Security Council assumes its institutional responsibilities and supports peace efforts.

Argentina expressly reaffirms that it is the political leaders of both parties who have caused so much suffering and are responsible for each and every one of the victims of the conflict they have unleashed. The international community and the Council should ensure that so much death does not go unpunished, and that the victims are not condemned to oblivion. We must keep their memory alive and demand justice in order to ensure a genuine, lasting peace.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's meeting to urgently discuss the volatile situation in the Middle East. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his presentation.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned as the situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip plunges dangerously into greater turmoil. Fierce air strikes and continued rocket barrages are gravely affecting a number of civilians on both sides. The launch of a ground operation by Israel is alarming, as it represents a serious escalation of the situation. We condemn the indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. The increased range of the rockets being deployed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad is particularly troubling, as it could extend the clashes to an even more dangerous level.

At the same time, we are concerned by the mounting civilian casualties in Gaza as a result of Israeli air strikes and shelling. We fear that such a large number of casualties will only increase if the ongoing hostilities continue. The humanitarian situation is also dire, and the daily updates of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on Gaza make for harrowing reading, as they describe over 600,000 people at risk of losing access to water, traumatized children in need of psychosocial support, mass displacements and a severe lack of food and medicine. We commend the ongoing work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for having negotiated a five-hour humanitarian pause between the two sides.

The Republic of Korea urges all Israelis and Palestinians to exercise maximum restraint before the situation spins even further out of control. We encourage the regional mediators to redouble their efforts to bring. While we are dismayed that the earlier Egyptian-proposed ceasefire did not hold, we hope that new modalities can be agreed upon that can bring relief to those in the crossfire. We reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire, as articulated by the press statement issued by the Council on 12 July (SC/11472). We strongly support the Secretary-General's efforts to de-escalate the situation, including through his trip to the Middle East tomorrow.

While working for a durable ceasefire in Gaza and a lessening of tensions in the West Bank, we must keep in mind that the only long-term answer is a negotiated settlement, with the two-State solution as its essence. As such, the Republic of Korea appeals to both sides to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Rwanda.

I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing on the current crisis in the Middle East, especially the situation in Gaza. I also thank Ambassador Ryad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine, and Ambassador Ron Prosor, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, for their respective statements.

Since the beginning of this month, the Security Council has issued three press statements on the situation in the region, starting with the condemnation of the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers and of a Palestinian teenager. Last Thursday, the Security Council convened an emergency meeting to discuss this tragedy (see S/PV.7214), which was followed by the third press statement of the month on the situation in Israel and Palestine, issued on Saturday (SC/11472). In that statement, Council members called for the de-escalation of the situation, the restoration of calm, the reinstitution of the November 2012 ceasefire, and respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians.

Unfortunately, the situation today in Gaza shows that parties on the ground did not heed this call. Hostilities have further escalated, leading to dire humanitarian consequences. The conflict has now claimed over 260 lives and left over 48,000 displaced. We welcomed the short humanitarian pause in Gaza, which had allowed the United Nations and partners to deliver humanitarian assistance to thousands of people in dire need. We call for more humanitarian pauses to allow more deliveries to flow without hindrance.

We express our strong support for the ceasefire agreement that was brokered by Egypt, as was that of November 2012. We note that this proposal was accepted by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the League of Arab States, but rejected by Hamas. We call upon Hamas to immediately cease fire and stop its indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel. Furthermore, while we recognize the right of Israel to defend itself, we call on the Israel Defense Forces to exercise maximum restraint and ensure that civilians in Gaza are protected.

To conclude, let me reaffirm that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the longest conflict on the agenda of the Security Council — will end only with the creation of a viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with a secured State of Israel. In this regard, we call on the Quartet, countries of the region, the United States and other countries with influence on the parties to redouble their efforts in order to reach a political settlement and help the Palestinians and Israelis to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to peace, security and prosperity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.