



Security Council SC/11155

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Security Council
7047th Meeting (AM & PM)

OPPORTUNITY CREATED BY RESUMED ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN TALKS MUST NOT BE LOST,

TOP UNITED NATIONS OFFICIAL TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

Delegates Urge Syrian Parties to Attend Geneva II Peace Conference

After 20 years of negative developments on the ground, the United Nations senior political official today urged taking advantage of the opening presented by resumed talks between Israel and Palestine to help resolve entrenched regional differences and achieve the long-desired vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.

"We don't need lengthy negotiations," said Jeffrey Feltman, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, briefing the Council during a day-long open debate on the Middle East, which heard from almost 50 speakers. What parties needed were the right decisions and leaders who were committed to ushering in an agreed political solution. "Despite the difficult regional context and the challenges on the ground between Israel and Palestine, this is not an opportunity that either can afford to lose," he stressed.

In that context, he urged maintaining — even increasing — the momentum behind diplomacy. For the first time in 17 months, the Quartet Principals had met in New York with the Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators on 27 September to discuss the progress of negotiations. Both sides had stressed their shared goal of ending the conflict on the basis of a vision of two States for two peoples.

At the same time, there had been "worrisome" developments that could not be ignored, he said. Palestinians had killed two Israeli soldiers during the reporting period, while clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers continued. On 13 October, the Israel Defense Forces announced that they had uncovered a mile-long tunnel from Gaza into Israel, which Hamas claimed it had built, suggesting it could be used for kidnapping.

Turning to Lebanon, he said cross-border shelling and shooting from Syria had injured at least three soldiers on 28 September. More broadly, the tragedy in Syria continued to test the collective resolve to end the violence. Efforts were continuing to convene the Geneva conference in mid-November, with the aim of helping the opposing sides launch a political process that would lead to agreement on how to implement the 30 June 2012 Geneva communiqué.

Following his remarks, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said support for peace negotiations required more than just commending the decision to resume talks and encouraging perseverance. It required helping parties overcome persistent obstacles, including by ensuring respect for the parameters of the solution towards the achievement of a final peace agreement.

He said the Council must be aware of the vastly negative impact that unlawful Israeli policies were having on the ground, on Palestinian faith in the fairness of the political process and its potential for success. Palestinians were prepared to undertake their responsibilities to resolve all final status issues — Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — leading to a just and lasting peace, but for a credible process to be sustained, the reality on the ground must be redressed.

Israel's representative said examples of incitement were all too easy to find in Palestinian society, citing the death of Gal Kobi, shot by a Palestinian "terrorist" last month. It was time for the Palestinian leadership to condemn such violence. The Palestinian delegation had accused Israel of denying people freedom of worship. However, one of Israel's first actions after having reunited Jerusalem in 1967 had been to abolish discriminatory laws and safeguard access to religious sites for people of all faiths.

As for Gaza, he said trucks loaded with hundreds of thousands of tons of food and medical equipment passed from Israel into the Strip each month. Israel was ready to make a historic compromise to realize the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian State, living alongside Israel.

When the floor was opened for debate, delegates voiced strong support for resumed negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, with some

registering concern at their pace and calling for adherence to the nine-month timeline. Others urged both sides to refrain from provocative acts — such as settlement building — that could derail the talks. Still, others appealed to the Council to uphold its most basic duty of ensuring its resolutions were implemented, a point made clear by Saudi Arabia's delegate, who blamed the Council's use of the veto for its "late and minimal" response to the attack in Al-Ghoutha. The Council must act firmly, adopting necessary resolutions with the possibility of sanctions.

For its part, the United States was deeply engaged in reaching a conclusion within the nine-month timeline, that country's representative said. The international community must alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Gaza and provide debt relief to the Palestinian Authority.

Egypt's delegate, noting disparities between the two parties sitting down for talks, said a solution to the Palestinian question would help the region build democratic stability. Failure to solve that issue would pose the main threat to the Occupying State. It warranted Council action.

The situation in Syria also received much attention today, with speakers welcoming that country's decision to cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in destroying its chemical weapons arsenal. Several called on opposition forces to implement short-term ceasefires and allow inspectors free and unfettered access to those sites. A political solution was the only way to surmount the strife, most delegates said, urging parties to commit to peace by taking part in the Geneva II Conference, slated for mid-November.

Syria's delegate said many speakers today had used allegations to shift attention from the topic at hand: Israeli occupation of Arab lands. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Syrians were being deprived of their rights, a largely overlooked issue. None of the Council's resolutions on the matter had been implemented. He asked how territory in Palestine and Lebanon ever could be reclaimed if the United Nations was unable to end Israeli occupation of Syrian territory.

On that note, Lebanon's delegate said it was "high time" for the Council to translate resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#) into a strong message urging Israel to withdraw from Lebanese occupied territory and stop violating his country's sovereignty. Jordan's delegate noted that his country's grave economic crisis had been heightened by the influx of Syrian refugees. His Government awaited the Council's response to its request to visit the country.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Russian Federation, Pakistan, Luxembourg, China, France, Rwanda, United Kingdom, Togo, Argentina, Morocco, Guatemala, Republic of Korea, Australia, Azerbaijan, India, Brazil, Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Japan, Turkey, European Union, Iceland, Holy See, Malaysia, Botswana, Venezuela, Tunisia, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Qatar, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, Norway, Namibia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Cuba and Djibouti (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation).

The Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People also made a statement.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 5:01 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this morning to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Briefing

JEFFREY FELTMAN, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said the Council was meeting amid heightened Middle East diplomacy, with discussions ongoing on both immediate crises and long-standing sources of regional tension, from the Syria "catastrophe" to the Middle East peace process, to questions concerning nuclear proliferation. While the challenges on each front should not be underestimated, it was important to maintain — and even increase — the momentum behind diplomacy, he said, encouraging the Council to fully explore all opportunities at hand in order peacefully to resolve the difficult issues bedeviling peace and security in the Middle East.

Central to the debate was the need to shape more favourable dynamics across the region and urgently to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said, noting that the test would be whether and at what pace current efforts could gain traction. Many had acknowledged the opportunity to save the two-State solution and realize the vision of a viable, independent Palestinian State living in peace alongside a secure Israel. Describing positive developments, he said that, for the first time in 17 months, the Quartet Principals had met in New York with the Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators on 27 September to discuss the progress of negotiations. Both sides had stressed their shared goal of ending the conflict on the basis of a vision of two States for two peoples.

Reaffirming its determination to support their efforts during the prescribed time frame, he continued, the Quartet had acknowledged the leadership of the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the State of Palestine to remain engaged in the negotiations. In addition, the Quartet Representative had briefed the meeting on the Palestinian Economic Initiative, aimed at bringing about transformative economic growth, to run in parallel with the negotiations. The Quartet had also discussed Gaza's humanitarian needs, emphasizing the importance of increased access to that area through legal crossings. Quartet Envoys would meet again soon as part of their now monthly meetings to report on progress, he said, adding that the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee had expressed its full support for the negotiations on 25 September.

At the same time, however, there had been worrisome developments that could not be ignored, he said, unequivocally reiterating calls on all parties to refrain from violence and incitement. Palestinians had killed two Israeli soldiers during the reporting period, with the Palestinian President publicly condemning the killings and both Israeli and Palestinian security officials holding coordination meetings to prevent an escalation of violence. The Israeli Defense Forces had reported numerous incidents of stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at civilian and military targets, in addition to the arrest of Palestinian terror suspects. Settlement activity obstructed peace and contravened international law, he said.

Clashes between Palestinians and settlers continued, and an 11 October incident of a Palestinian beating an Israeli settler to death was under investigation, he continued. Israeli settlers had injured eight Palestinians, including three children, in so-called "price-tag" attacks, including the desecration of a mosque in the Palestinian village of Burqa. Settler attacks against Palestinian farmers had also damaged more than 1,080 trees and saplings. On 3 October, the Israeli military had demolished 58 structures in the Bedouin community of Makhoul, reinforcing the United Nations belief that Palestinians required access to a fair planning and zoning regime, he said.

Turning to the situation in the Gaza Strip, he said the calm was showing worrying signs of erosion. On 13 October, the Israel Defense Forces had announced that they had uncovered a mile-long tunnel from Gaza into Israel, for the construction of which Hamas had claimed responsibility, suggesting its potential use for kidnapping operations. He condemned such tunnels as a violation of the November 2012 ceasefire.

Noting that Gazans were suffering increased food insecurity and significant energy problems impacting health, water and sanitation services, he pointed out that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) faced a \$48 million deficit in its budget for education, health and poverty mitigation, threatening its delivery of services to more than 5 million refugees.

Turning to Lebanon, he said cross-border shelling and shooting from Syria had injured at least three soldiers on 28 September, while the President of Lebanon had condemned a 7 October missile attack by a Syrian helicopter on the border town of Aarsal. In a welcome development, nine Lebanese pilgrims held captive in Syria for 17 months had been released on 19 October. The 25 September meeting convened by the Secretary-General to launch the International Support Group for Lebanon had reaffirmed international support for the country's stability and its policy of disassociation, he said.

As for Syria, he said the Secretary-General continued to insist that the one way to bring peace there was through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. With that in mind, efforts were continuing to convene the Geneva conference in mid-November, with the aim of helping the opposing sides launch a political process that would lead to agreement on how to implement the 30 June 2012 Geneva communiqué. In addition, the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained volatile, amid heavy clashes between Syrian Government forces and members of the armed opposition inside the area of separation.

Returning to the Middle East Peace process, he urged the parties to take advantage of the opening that now existed, stressing that, after 20 years of talks, "we don't need lengthy negotiations". Parties needed the right decisions and leaders who were committed to an agreed political solution. Despite the challenges between Israel and Palestine, "this is not an opportunity that either can afford to lose".

Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said the persistence of Israeli impunity and recklessness would squander yet another opportunity to make peace a reality. Support for peace negotiations required more than just commending the decision to resume negotiations and encouraging perseverance. It required meaningful action to help the parties overcome persistent obstacles, including by ensuring respect for the parameters of the solution towards the actual achievement of a final peace agreement. The State of Palestine was upholding its commitment to a peaceful, negotiated solution based on established international parameters and was acting with seriousness of purpose in pursuit of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations.

"We have seriously engaged in several rounds of negotiation with Israel, maintaining our focus on the overall objectives of peace and coexistence, despite the striking imbalance of power and the cyclical distractions and complications caused by the occupying Power," he continued. The Palestinians did so despite the hardships they were enduring under occupation and despite the challenges faced by the Government in addressing the people's needs under such conditions. Expressing gratitude for the international community's efforts for peace, he said tangible progress remained elusive amid diminishing hopes. Provocative Israeli actions and declarations undermined the spirit and intent of the negotiations.

The Council must be aware of the vastly negative impact that unlawful Israeli policies were having on the ground, on Palestinian faith in the fairness of the political process and its potential for success, he emphasized. Israel continued its settlement activities in grave breach of international law and the objectives and spirit of the talks, and with full knowledge that its illegal actions were further undermining the contiguity of the Palestinian Territory and the viability of a two-State solution. The international community must reject such illegal actions and tactics, he stressed, calling the Council's immediate attention to the dangers arising from Israeli provocations in Occupied East Jerusalem, particularly at the Al-Haram al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosques.

Israel also persisted in collective punishment of and systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people, while the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remained of grave concern amid the illegal blockade, he continued. He reiterated two specific calls: protection of Palestinian civilians, in accordance with humanitarian law, and the lifting of the inhumane blockade on the Palestinian people and sustained opening of the Gaza crossings. Palestinians were prepared to undertake their responsibilities to resolve all final status issues — Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — leading to a just and lasting peace, but for a credible process to be sustained, the reality on the ground must be redressed, he stressed.

RON PROSOR (Israel) said that, as the political landscape of the Middle East evolved, the international community must show resolve. Focusing on Iran, he said that President Hassan Rouhani had tried to reinforce his image as a moderate, but the Iranian regime was notorious for violating women's rights, targeting religious and ethnic minorities and denying freedoms to its citizens. Furthermore, Iran continued to march towards a bomb, he said, noting that since President Rouhani's election, Iran had installed thousands of new centrifuges. "Make no mistake, the Iranian programme is not for peaceful purposes," he warned. In negotiations with Iran, the global community must "distrust, dismantle and verify", he emphasized asking why Israel — alongside a minority of other countries — were the only ones warning that a nuclear-armed Iran would threaten the entire region.

Turning to Syria, he said no one with a conscience could stand by as Syrians continued to be massacred, whether by chemical weapons or the brutality of the Bashar al-Assad regime. While Israel and Syria had a long history of conflict, they were linked by their common humanity, and Israel could continue to offer humanitarian assistance to all those in need, regardless of race, religion or gender, he stressed. While applauding the steps taken by the international community, he underlined the priority importance of removing and destroying Syria's chemical arsenal, with assurance that the process would be monitored, verified and completed in line with agreed timelines.

More broadly, he said Middle East peace required leaders courageous enough to embrace partnership and promote tolerance, noting that examples of incitement were all too easy to find in Palestinian society. Their results could be found in the death of Gal Kobi, shot by a Palestinian "terrorist" last month. It was time for the Palestinian leadership to condemn such violence.

He went on to point out that General Assembly [resolution 181 \(II\)](#), dividing the British Mandate over Palestine referred to the creation of a Jewish State 25 times. From the time that Israel had gained independence in 1948 until 1967, the West Bank had been in Jordanian hands and Gaza in Egyptian hands, yet Palestinians still sought Israel's destruction. He went on to recall that the Palestinian delegation had accused Israel of denying people freedom of worship. However, one of Israel's first actions after having reunited Jerusalem in 1967 had been to abolish discriminatory laws and safeguard access to religious sites for people of all faiths. In contrast, the Palestinian leadership had bred incitement on the Temple Mount.

As for Gaza, he said that trucks loaded with hundreds of thousands of tons of food, medical equipment and construction materials passed from Israel into the Strip each month. The recent involvement of some United Nations entities had hardly been helpful, he noted, cautioning that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs must remember that its role was not to aid in the obstruction of justice. Israel was ready to make a historic compromise to realize the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian State, living alongside Israel, he said.

SAMANTHA POWER (United States) said the Council, through its resolution on Syria's chemical weapons, had reaffirmed its role as the guardian of international stability. To have meaning, however, the resolution needed to be implemented immediately and with great rigour. What the international

community was attempting was without precedent: locating, securing and destroying chemical weapons in a country torn by conflict. Stressing that the responsibility lay with the Syrian Government, she reiterated Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's recent statement that "the red light for one thing does not mean green light for another". Syria was disintegrating and the only viable way forward was a political transition based on the Geneva process, in which Assad had no part to play. The United States supported consultations to convene the Geneva II conference.

In terms of alleviating the humanitarian suffering, statements alone were not enough, she said. The world needed to track progress and press for compliance. Protecting civilians and stopping the daily assault on medical neutrality were urgent. Stating that the Syrian health-care system was shattered, she urged the Government to lift bureaucratic blocks on medical aid and non-State actors and extend full support to medical access. Turning to Lebanon, she said the country was most affected by the Syrian war, with almost a fifth of the population now refugees from Syria. The international community must help Lebanon lift this extraordinary burden. On the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the United States remained deeply engaged in reaching a conclusion within the nine-month timeline. The international community must help the Palestinian people and economy, alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Gaza and provide debt relief for the Palestinian Authority. Criticizing any calls for violence, she said it was important to maintain calm in sensitive places. "It is essential to build trust and confidence necessary for building just and lasting peace," she said.

VITALY CHURKIN ([Russian Federation](#)) noted the difficulty of reaching consensus on the two-State solution, with parties seeking to solve all final status issues. It would not be possible to reach agreement on all of those issues. Final agreement was the responsibility of the negotiating parties. Any agreement must not be externally imposed. The Quartet was the Council's mechanism to foster progress and its cooperation with the League of Arab States would help resolve chronic problems. The Arab Peace Initiative was important for restoring Palestinian unity on the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) platform. Settlement of the Arab-Israeli issue would foster regional stability. Measures from both sides to improve the atmosphere surrounding negotiations should be a sine qua non. On Syria, he urged all parties to meet in Geneva and to address their problems, noting that the Syrian Government had outlined its readiness. The armed opposition must provide full assistance to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

SAHEBZADA KHAN ([Pakistan](#)) said negotiations in Jericho and Jerusalem had taken place amid reports that were "less than encouraging". But, Pakistan remained optimistic that "things behind the scenes were moving in the right direction". The nine-month deadline was critical. Welcoming that the Quartet had met on 27 September, he said the Council's credibility was linked to a peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue, which required action on the ground. He asked how trust could be built amid settlement construction and the detainment of Palestinian prisoners. He welcomed the European Union's guidelines on settlements. He supported an independent, viable State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. On Syria, he said the real solution lay in dialogue and welcomed renewed momentum towards the convening of Geneva II as early as November.

SYLVIE LUCAS ([Luxembourg](#)), aligning herself with the statement to be made by the European Union, welcomed the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. However, there were no illusions that numerous obstacles must be overcome. She hoped that with the active involvement of the United States, Israel and Palestine would be able to negotiate with the necessary discretion and good faith, and make sacrifices for lasting peace. The time had come to make the necessary historic decision for a two-State solution. The unilateral acts that fuelled the logic of defiance must cease, she said, adding that illegal activities and tensions and provocative acts must end. Palestinians must work to stop violence in the West Bank and the firing of rockets from Gaza. On Syria, she said the Council had made two key decisions since the last briefing: on disarmament and humanitarian access. The dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal was an enormous job. No effort must be spared to help the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and United Nations undertaking. Syria must fulfil all commitments, she said, adding that Luxembourg had provided satellite communications facilities and financial contributions to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and United Nations endeavours. The elimination of chemical weapons alone will not end the suffering of the Syrian people. The situation must be referred to the International Criminal Court while a political resolution was pursued.

WANG MIN ([China](#)) said the Palestinian issue was at the heart of the Middle East question. China had always maintained, in line with the principles of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the [Road Map](#) for Peace, that an independent and sovereign State of Palestine should be created along pre-1967 borders, with two States living side by side in peace and security. Resumed negotiations offered a rare opportunity for the peace process and he hoped both sides would seize it in order to achieve progress. He called for measures to halt settlements and preserve the climate for talks. On Gaza, he urged Israel to lift all blockades. On Syria, he said a political solution must be promoted, noting that China attached great importance to the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. China was ready to work with relevant experts in that regard and it was ready to take part in the Geneva II conference.

GÉRARD ARAUD ([France](#)) commended the efforts of the United States and the Quartet to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Both sides should take confidence-building measures to sketch a fair, lasting peace. Calling for an end to all obstacles to negotiations, he said ongoing settlements violated international laws and put in jeopardy the two-State solution. All forms of violent acts must end. Israeli security and respect for the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people must be upheld. The sustainable economic development of the Palestinian people would help the prospects for peace. Israel should enhance its recent flexibility measures. On Syria, the Council must act firmly on the destruction of the country's chemical weapons and follow up any breaches to that. The situation on the ground, however, was grim, with civilians continuing to be killed. A transitional government enjoying full power and political authority over the armed forces and intelligence was vital. Three weeks after the Council adopted a presidential statement regarding easing humanitarian access there had been no improvement on the ground. The Under-Secretary-General in charge of humanitarian affairs should speak before the Council to take stock. On Lebanon, he said the country faced deteriorating security, as well as political and institutional paralysis. All stakeholders in Lebanon must preserve the policy of disassociation. The global community must support the country economically.

EUGÈNE-RICHARD GASANA ([Rwanda](#)) said now was the time for bold steps towards peace in the Middle East, with negotiations on the Israel-Palestinian conflict giving rise to a two-State solution. Parties must maintain momentum towards agreement, he said, cautioning against subversive activities. On Syria, he condemned all forms of violence, regardless of who perpetrated it. Welcoming progress following the adoption of Council resolution 2118 (2013), he was encouraged by Syria's cooperation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. He urged rebels to permit access to chemical weapons sites and for all parties to sign a ceasefire with the aim of dismantling those weapons. There was no military solution to the Syrian crisis. As such, he called on all parties to set a date for the Geneva II conference. On Lebanon, where violence was increasingly sectarian, the global community must condemn such acts. He called on all parties in Syria to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

MARK LYALL GRANT ([United Kingdom](#)), welcoming the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, said it was imperative to ensure the development of the Palestinian economy. It was important for both parties to build confidence, he said, expressing concern over recent attacks on both sides and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice. All parties should work to keep things calm at the holy sites. The two-State solution was the best hope of ending the conflict once and for all. The Council had imposed binding and enforceable obligations on Syria. The voluntary destruction of Syria's chemical weapons was a huge step forward. He called for the creation of a transitional government with full executive powers, in which President Assad would have no future role. The United Kingdom would work with the Syrian National Coalition and others who rejected extremism. All Member States should support the Third Committee's resolution on Syria's human rights situation. The Council's presidential statement on humanitarian access must be translated into action, he said, adding that, every 15 seconds, a Syrian became a refugee. Recognizing the scale and despair of the crisis, the United Kingdom had contributed \$800 million in aid to Syria. There was genuine international unity on upholding Lebanon's stability, he said, urging Lebanese parties to form a Government.

KODJO MENAN ([Togo](#)), welcoming resumed negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, also noted his concern at their speed and urged both sides to refrain from any actions that would harm the potential for settling the conflict. He pressed Israel to release 26 prisoners held since 13 August. He called for the embargo on Gaza to be lifted, encouraging Hamas to stop all provocative acts. Hamas' commitment alongside that of the Palestinian Authority would help guarantee the negotiations' success. Encouraging the Friends of Israel and Palestine to support the negotiations, he urged the return of the United States Secretary of State to the region. As for Syria, he welcomed the Council's unity in creating a mechanism to dismantle the country's chemical weapons. The destruction of chemical weapons must not hide the damage caused by gross human rights violations, acts which he condemned. On Lebanon, he said living with refugees was growing more difficult as the country was surpassing its ability to welcome them.

MARÍA CRISTINA PERCEVAL ([Argentina](#)), noting that three of the nine months envisaged for the Israeli-Palestinian talks had gone by, said the information received so far suggested complex, but also extremely slow progress. She expressed concern over the tendency to question the broadly accepted principles for negotiations on the grounds of injecting realism and pragmatism. While appearing largely in the press, such comments nevertheless raised questions. Thus, it was important for the Council to express itself and take concrete steps to bolster the overwhelming opinion in favour of the two-State solution. Citing the increase in illegal settlements, displacement in East Jerusalem, rocket launches against Israel and the rhetoric of confrontation, she said the next several months would be decisive in ending what had become morally, politically and strategically unacceptable. A month after the Council's adoption of a resolution on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons arsenal, there had been a good start to the process with the cooperation of the Syrian Government. The resolution also called for a political process through the Geneva II conference, she said, urging the international community to demonstrate political will and determination to achieve a political settlement and alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI ([Morocco](#)) said negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians towards a comprehensive agreement was a "promising sign", as it had broken the three-year paralysis of the peace process. Yet, some positions sought to undermine confidence in the two parties. All parties must commit to a clear plan and deadline, and not obstruct the process, including through settlement activities and attacks on Al Haram al-Sharif. Palestinians had shown restraint despite the embargo against them, while Arab States had shown their good faith in promoting the Arab Peace Initiative. The identity of Al-Quds, as a city for all three monotheistic religions, must be preserved. On Syria, he said the Council had shown its ability to unify with the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), urging reconciliation of that situation in a manner that involved all Syrians.

GERT ROSENTHAL ([Guatemala](#)) said that, while differences existed between the situations in Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Egypt and elsewhere, open and inclusive dialogue was vital in all cases to contain violence and prevent future clashes. He welcomed continued dialogue between Israel and the State of Palestine, but noted the pending issues seemed "increasingly insurmountable". He encouraged continued involvement of the Quartet and regional actors. He called on both sides to avoid any acts that could jeopardize negotiations, notably settlement expansion, settler violence, rocket attacks and inflammatory language. He called for an immediate end to violence in Syria, and urged the international community to stop transferring arms to any of the warring parties there. He was encouraged that half the inspections of Syria's chemical arsenal were complete. Underlining the vital importance of transparency and monitoring to the "unprecedented" joint mission, he also underlined the need for the Geneva conference to go ahead in November and for dialogue to prevail. He expressed concerns about "deep divisions among the Syrian opposition groups", saying he hoped the conference would trigger the obligation for all sides to lay down their weapons and help alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe. Stressing the importance of punishing the perpetrators of crimes committed during the conflict, he also called for a constructive dialogue on reconciliation.

SUL KYUNG-HOON ([Republic of Korea](#)) said it was understandable that information about the talks between Israel and the State of Palestine was limited, but added that "it would be naïve to simply assume that no news is good news". Hard realities of the situation on the ground threatened to spoil the atmosphere of dialogue at any time and he called for joint efforts to build confidence alongside the talks. Creative incentives for both sides needed to be explored. He welcomed appointment of Sigrid Kaag as Special Coordinator and looked forward to her helping to ensure the Joint Mission stayed on track. The Syrian regime must fulfil their obligations under Council resolution 2118 (2013) and as a member of the Chemical Weapons Convention. With the death toll continuing to rise, he condemned human rights and international humanitarian law violations and supported the recent Council presidential statement on the matter. He addressed the spillover of the humanitarian crisis to neighbouring countries, noting the socioeconomic and political strain it put on host countries. Lebanon and Jordan were affected in particular and the international community needed to step in. He added a call for further steps to bring the crisis to an end through a negotiated political solution and looked forward to the Geneva II conference.

GARY QUINLAN ([Australia](#)) said the historic opportunity in the Middle East peace process must not be missed, as the status quo could not continue. He commended the United States' activism in leading final status negotiations, but voiced concern at attacks that had led to the deaths of Israelis in the West Bank. Earlier clashes that had led to Palestinian deaths there were also of concern. On Syria, Council resolution 2118 (2013) and its presidential statement on humanitarian assistance showed that the global community could work together towards regional peace. The Syrian regime must fully comply with that resolution, while the Council must rigorously monitor compliance. Only a political solution could resolve the crisis and he urged the Syrian regime and opposition to participate in the Geneva II process. More broadly, Lebanon and Jordan needed support in containing the effects of the Syrian conflict.

AGSHIN MEHDYEV ([Azerbaijan](#)), speaking in his national capacity, described the past few weeks as "remarkable" in terms of the revitalization of the Middle East peace process. He hoped the parties would demonstrate continuing good faith in the search for a lasting solution, adding that the process should be guided by the normative standards established in the Charter. Military conflict could not be an excuse to undermine human rights. New settlements constituted a violation of international law, a serious threat to the peace process, and an infringement of Palestinian rights. The Council should make efforts to ensure that international law was upheld in all aspects. Further easing of restrictions on Palestinians was necessary, as were efforts to create a socially and economically viable Palestinian State. On Syria, he expressed satisfaction with the progress so far on efforts towards eliminating that country's chemical weapons arsenal. All parties should engage constructively in the political process. The Geneva II conference was central to a negotiated political settlement.

NAWAF SALAM ([Lebanon](#)) said it was high time for the Council to translate its support of resolution 1701 (2006) into a strong message urging Israel to completely withdraw from the remaining Lebanese occupied territory to end its violations of his country's sovereignty. His delegation deeply appreciated the message of political solidarity endorsing Lebanon's disassociation policy regarding the situation in Syria. With the ongoing crisis, Syrian refugees now represented one quarter of Lebanon's population and studies showed a 2.9 per cent drop in economic growth and a \$1.1 billion increase in Government expenditures over 2012 to 2014. That had put an enormous strain on the country, which was 18 times smaller than Syria. He welcomed the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), as united actions by the international community should end violence, provide a safe and dignified gradual return of Syrian refugees to their country, and pave the way for a political process that would fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people.

Turning to Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, he noted that, three months into the set timeframe, Israeli authorities continued settlement expansion. Empowered by a sense of impunity, Israeli settlers had multiplied their assaults on Palestinian civilians and their properties, attacking primary schools and terrorizing children, robbing farmers and vandalizing churches and mosques. Clearly, such actions threatened to undermine the prospects for the negotiations and must be condemned in the strongest terms. He reminded the Council that such negotiations must be part of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to attain a durable and sustainable peace in the Middle East.

PRENEET KAUR, Minister of State for External Affairs of [India](#) , said that her country was encouraged by the ongoing direct talks between Israel and

Palestine, facilitated by the United States, which had resumed after one of the longest periods of stalemate since the signing of the Oslo Accords. It was necessary to address the issue of Israeli settlement activities which were continuing unabated, and posed a serious threat to the two-State solution. It was also crucial for Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza and allow normal and unrestricted movement of persons and goods within Palestine. India remained steadfast in its support for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet Road Map and various United Nations resolutions. Given the financial difficulties that the Palestinian Authority continued to face, India was committed to support it bilaterally, as well as through the India, Brazil and South Africa Fund, known as the IBSA Fund.

MOOTAZ KHALIL (Egypt), associating his delegation with statements of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said that a solution to the Palestinian question would help the region build democratic stability. However, failure to find such a solution would pose the main threat to the occupying State. Referring to the increase in illegal settlements by Israel, he said such actions led the region to question the motives of the Israeli Government in pursuing talks. He condemned the blockade of Gaza and acts of terrorism carried out by settlers against Palestinians, as well as the systematic violations at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The decrease in funds to UNRWA and resulting reduction in services would undermine the credible of the United Nations. Further, Egypt rejected Israeli efforts to use the crisis in Syria to evade its responsibility to withdraw from the Golan. The unresolved Palestinian issue remained a major threat to international peace and security, warranting Council action.

GUILHERME DE AGUIAR PATRIOTA (Brazil) said a new dynamic might be emerging in the Middle East, as a perspective of progress on the Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian tracks had appeared. Condemning chemical weapons' use in Syria, he welcomed that country's decision to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria must continue to cooperate with the United Nations and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, as must the opposition, in implementing their obligations. There was no military solution to the conflict. Calling for the Geneva communiqué to be urgently implemented, he said, in addition to regional players, other players who could contribute to its success should be invited to the Geneva II conference. He strongly supported Lebanon's policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict. Welcoming resumed negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, he commended United States' efforts in that regard, stressing that the Council must provide support to the peace process.

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, welcomed parties' commitment to reaching a comprehensive agreement within nine months. He was encouraged that United States mediation would be stepped up. But, the Council had yet to reach its full potential and it was imperative that it act forcefully to counteract provocations during the current sensitive phase. Concerned at continued Israeli settlement announcements, he also voiced concern at provocative acts near Al-Aqsa Mosque. Palestinians faced a worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. Donor support must be accompanied by a full lifting of restrictions imposed by the occupying Power.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said concerns about the situation in Palestine remained as negotiations had been affected by Israeli settlement activities, the Gaza Strip blockade and military raids. Israeli officials continued recklessly to fuel religious tensions by encouraging extremists. He called for steps to halt all such Israeli incitement and for respect for the sanctity of religious sites. He condemned Israel's systematic violence and human rights violations against the Palestinian people and construction of the separation wall and urged the international community to continue calling on Israel, the occupying Power, to respect its obligations under international law and to cease all such illegal acts and violence.

He renewed the Non-Aligned Movement's call for continued support and aid to the Palestinian people in their legitimate, historic struggle for justice, dignity, peace and the exercise of their right to self-determination. Turning to the situation in Lebanon, he said that country had suffered from continued Israeli occupation, aggression and violation of its airspace. The provisions of Council resolution 1701 (2006) should be implemented to guarantee the consolidation of stability and security in Lebanon and to prevent Israel's daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty. He condemned all measures by Israel on the Syrian Golan that intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. He demanded that Israel abide by Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully to the 1967 borders, as called for in Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#) and [338 \(1973\)](#).

MOTOHIDE YOSHIKAWA (Japan), welcoming negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, said his country was committed to assisting Palestinian State-building efforts in order to create an environment for achieving peace through a two-State solution. The "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" project was designed to transform part of the Jordan Valley into productive land, allowing Palestinians to export agricultural products. The Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, launched in February, aimed at sharing East Asian experiences and resources for Palestinian economic development. On Syria, he welcomed the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), saying that his country would cooperate towards the disposal of Syria's chemical weapons. It also would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and neighbouring countries.

MUSTAFA LEVENT BILGEN (Turkey), expressing support for a two-State solution, said the denial of the Palestinians' right to have a State of their own had no legal grounds. He welcomed the peace talks, but was concerned by Israel's continuing illegal settlement activities, which remained a major obstacle to meaningful negotiations. Other concerns included the situation of Palestinian prisons and the illegal Gaza blockade. Turning to Syria, he called the crisis the biggest humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century, with more than 2 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, including 600,000 in Turkey. The agreement to destroy Syria's chemical arsenal must not allow the regime to avoid responsibility for its other crimes and the world should not lose sight of the fact that more than 100,000 people were killed by the regime's conventional weapons. There was an immediate need for a political solution and he supported the establishment of a transitional government.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the European Union delegation, said the situation in Syria was an extreme concern and he condemned the continuing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. Only a political solution would end those violations. Supporting the Secretary-General's call for a peace conference next month, he called on the opposition to participate actively. Condemning the recent chemical attacks, he said there should be no impunity for any crimes. He was also concerned about the growing involvement of extremist foreign non-State actors in fighting in Syria and called on all relevant parties to halt the support of those groups. Addressing the serious issue of internally displaced persons and the resulting humanitarian aspects, he renewed the Union's commitment to respond to needs in Syria and neighbouring countries.

Regarding the peace process, he urged all parties to refrain from actions that could undermine negotiations. Noting the dramatic shortfall in fiscal revenue due to slowing economic development in the Palestinian territory, he called on donors, especially those in the region, to increase financial support. Turning to Lebanon's humanitarian, economic and security challenges, he said it was of utmost importance that a Government be formed in that country.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR (Iceland) said her country condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria and requested that the Council referred the situation to the International Criminal Court. As mentioned at last week's Council meeting on women, peace and security, she reiterated the importance of women as mediators and participation in peace negotiations. Journalists in Syria must be granted free access and be able to report without obstruction. Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she welcomed renewed peace talks, but was concerned about continuing settlement activities, which were an obstacle to peace. Negotiations that led to two States living in peace and security was the only way forward, she concluded.

FRANCIS ASSISI CHULLIKATT, Permanent Observer of the Holy See, said that extremist and reactionary forces introduced to the Middle East as a result of the Syrian conflict had been targeting Christians and other religious cultures. Christians had been forced to flee the region out of fear of further harm, an unacceptable repeat of the situation in Iraq, when sectarian violence reduced the Christian population by 70 per cent. There were more than 4 million internally displaced refugees of every religion and culture within the borders of Syria, three quarters of whom were women and children. Hundreds of thousands of people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries and outside the region. The Catholic Church remained actively committed to providing humanitarian aid to these people regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. He urgently called upon all parties to immediately end the violence and begin a real process of dialogue during the Geneva II conference. On the Palestinian and Israeli conflict, he welcomed the resumption of direct, serious and concrete negotiations. For the diplomats and representatives at the United Nations, the challenges of the Middle East were a clarion call to the task of peacemaking. By mustering the needed political will, the international community could help the peoples of the Middle East fulfil the dream of long-awaited peace.

HUSSEIN HANIFF (Malaysia) welcomed resumed negotiations between both sides, underlining support for the State of Palestine in its work towards a just, lasting solution to the question of Palestine and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. He also welcomed the involvement of the United States Secretary of State, Middle East Quartet and Arab League Peace Initiative, adding that his Government had always believed in a two-State solution. Palestinians' commitment had been clearly shown in their work to foster an atmosphere conducive for those talks. Condemning Israel's illegal settlements, he also demanded an immediate lifting of its blockade of Gaza. On Syria, he condemned the use of chemical weapons and was appalled by civilian casualties stemming from conflict in that country. On Lebanon, he urged Israel to desist from its almost-daily violations of that country's sovereignty.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said a number of delegations had falsely used allegations to shift attention from the item to be discussed today: the Israeli occupation of Arab lands. He said his country would not reply to allegations made by States that supported terrorists that had infiltrated Syria with extremist Wahhabism and other extremist beliefs. Israel had occupied Arab territory in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. Successive Israeli Governments had perpetrated systematic violations of international law that amounted to war crimes for more than half a century, including settlement campaigns, disregard of Council resolutions, the destruction of holy sites and the eviction of people from their homes.

In the occupied Syrian Golan, the suffering of Syrians was still under way, a topic largely overlooked by today's debate, he said. Syrians in the Golan faced racism, discrimination and other violations of their human rights. None of the Council resolutions had been implemented, including those calling for an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan, he said, adding that United Nations resolutions were adopted to be implemented not to become meaningless. As long as the United Nations was unable to terminate Israel's occupation of Syria's territory, he asked what the alternative would be. How could the territory in Palestine, Syria and south Lebanon be reclaimed?, he said. Some States should end double-standard policies in order to end the tragedies of occupation. It was a paradox that Israel was established by a United Nations resolution and that none of the resolutions regarding Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian land had been implemented.

PRINCE ZEID RA'AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) said Israeli-Palestinian negotiations raised hopes for a comprehensive peace settlement based on two States. The objective was threatened by "spoilers" who hoped to scupper peace efforts. The Israeli Government needed to stop settler groups from provoking a crisis that could torpedo the talks and "unleash a colossal, overwhelming, global crisis on a scale hitherto not witnessed this century". Warning against any settlement-building-related activities, he stressed the unambiguous position of the International Court of Justice which had invalidated such activities. Escalating violence in Syria along with growing religious divisions posed a threat to regional and international security. The political transition in Syria must move ahead. Jordan faced a grave economic crisis which was heightened by the influx of Syrian refugees. Jordan had detailed that crisis to the Council in April and had invited it to visit Jordan. He still awaited a response to the request, he said, noting that Jordan had received no compensation for its losses.

ALEJANDRO MORENO (Venezuela) associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the international community needed to renew momentum to ensure peace in the Middle East. Israel continued to act with impunity and had lost the ability to criticize any other Member State. He called for a positive atmosphere to surround the negotiations, which required an end to all settlement activities. Proposals to apply sanctions against Israel had been met with the veto in the Council. That situation needed urgent review in line with the Council's mandate. The Palestinian's commitment to negotiate in good faith was met with ongoing aggression and provocations that threatened regional peace. Israel's violations of Lebanese sovereignty must be addressed. Dialogue was needed to solve the crisis in Syria. Some States were seeking to promote their own geopolitical interests, encouraging and financing groups involved in terrorism, including acts like the attacks on 11 September 2001. Calling for a negotiated solution, he commended the Syrian Government for joining the Chemical Weapons Convention.

NKOLOI NKOLOI (Botswana) said millions of women and children had been displaced in Syria, where 6.8 million required urgent medical assistance, while another 1.7 million refugees were scattered and stranded in neighbouring countries. He called on the international community and humanitarian organizations to respond with kindness and care to the refugees. He welcomed the Council's resolution to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons, but would have preferred it to include stronger language on measures to be taken in case parties failed to comply with its provisions. Regarding the peace process, he called on all parties to create an environment of mutual trust throughout the negotiations. A stable and peaceful Middle East would not only usher in prosperity for the region's people; it also would allow them to play a pivotal role in the development of the world as a whole.

RIADH BEN SLIMAN (Tunisia) underscoring that the Palestinian issue was key to peace and stability in the region, said he looked forward to the ongoing talks resulting in a final settlement that included a clear, well-defined timetable for a sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital. On the ground, there had been non-constructive declarations that did not reflect the seriousness of the situation. Condemning Israel's illegal settlement activities, he said that the international community should act urgently to end such a flagrant breach of international law. He denounced continuing attacks on Palestinians, including harassment and humiliation and infringement of fundamental rights. Further, he condemned attempts to "Judaize" Jerusalem in addition to the campaigns of daily attacks against Muslim and Christian shrines. Expressing deep concern vis-à-vis Syria, he said the killing, destruction and terror had the potential to create grave consequences across the region at the humanitarian level. A political settlement needed to be accelerated with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

TALAIK KYDYROV (Kyrgyzstan) stressed how concerned the international community was over the situation in Syria, but added that current efforts to resolve the conflict and restore stability remained insufficient. He called for an immediate ceasefire and the peaceful resolution of the crisis through dialogue mediated by the United Nations. He supported the agreement on chemical weapons and welcomed Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. More efforts were needed, though such efforts should respect Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Heads of States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization had adopted declarations at recent high-level summits in Kyrgyzstan and the Russia Federation calling for a second Geneva conference. Stressing that the situation in Syria should not distract from the Israel-Palestine question, he welcomed resumption of direct talks over the latter and stressed the need to continue negotiations. He was seriously concerned over continued illegal actions by Israel and reiterated his conviction that the Quartet should be more active in the peace process.

DESRA PERCAYA (Indonesia), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and OIC, said he was encouraged by resumed negotiations and hoped that an independent Palestine could be achieved. Successful negotiations depended on the maintenance of conducive conditions and he urged

Israel to stop construction of settlements and the separation wall. Israel's cancellation of a recent visit by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to Jerusalem showed its utter disregard for the principle of good faith in international relations. The Security Council needed to ensure that steps were taken to ensure the State of Palestine was treated equally and with respect. Immediate cessation of violence in Syria was necessary and international human rights law and humanitarian law had to be upheld. He welcomed Syria's response to the safeguarding and destruction of its chemical weapons, saying that important step was an opportunity for renewed efforts to find a peaceful solution. He urged the international community to deepen commitment to an inclusive political process reflecting all Syrians' wishes.

SACHA SERGIO LLORENTTY SOLÍZ (Bolivia) said the region could find a just, lasting and peaceful future only by ending the occupation that had begun in 1967 and by establishing an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. He expressed grave concern over continuing Israeli closures and restrictions which continued to undermine the living conditions of 1.7 million Palestinians. The international community must guarantee investigations concerning thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, as well as the stepped up illegal activities and violation of the sanctity of shrines. It was crucial the Council gave clear signals that such crimes did not go unpunished. While welcoming the peace talks, he said that the world could not allow them to become a stalling tactic which would enable continuation of crimes against the Palestinian people. On Syria, he cautioned against any unilateral action and called on collective wisdom to prevail.

FERNANDO YÉPEZ LASSO (Ecuador) said the illegal and harsh acts by the occupying Power continued to raise questions of credibility over the ongoing negotiations. Wondering what Israel was seeking, he said that he hoped it was a just solution to the long-standing Palestinian question and the establishment of genuine and lasting peace and security in the region. However, he also wondered if Israel intended to continue its unilateral violations of international law and infliction of suffering upon the Palestinian people. He concluded by expressing solidarity with the other countries and peoples that were suffering from Israeli occupation.

ALYA AHMED S.A. AL-THANI (Qatar) said she supported international efforts to reactivate the peace process based on known points of reference. Success of the process would be based on the sincere willingness of both parties. She criticized settlement activities and any attempt to alter the demographic nature of Palestinian territory. The international community must find a solution that created an independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, especially as the current status quo jeopardized any prospects for peace. Continued violations by the Syrian regime had led to a catastrophe there, she said, noting the use of weapons of mass destruction. The Council had agreed on the abhorrence of chemical weapons use and it was bound to help protect civilians. The Council's recent presidential statement on the issue had called on the international community to act urgently and decisively, using all relevant mechanisms to address the humanitarian crisis that Syrians, including children, continued to face.

MARÍA RUBIALES DE CAMORRO (Nicaragua) supporting the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, stressed the importance of political will, good faith and transparency to successful negotiations. Israel, however, had shown an absence of political will, as well as bad faith and a lack of transparency, intensifying settlement-building, tightening the blockade of Gaza and violating Palestinians' most basic rights. She lamented slow progress in the resumed negotiations, saying that demonstrated Israel's true intentions, which were to "continue to gain time to permanently alter the demographic and religious composition of those territories". Aggression in occupied East Jerusalem had escalated and the Council must follow up to ensure that Israel committed fully to negotiations. Expressing solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners held in Israel, she demanded the release of 5,000 currently held arbitrarily. Palestine had not yet received international recognition because the veto of one permanent Council member stood in the way. She concluded with a call to declare 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) said the Palestinians had been subjected to a regime of oppression without precedent anywhere on earth. When negotiations resumed under United States mediation, there was a ray of hope. But, as time progressed, that sense of optimism had started to fade as Israel continued to press ahead with its illegal settlement policies that presented the main stumbling block to progress. The construction of Israel's barrier in and around the West Bank and the expansion of settlements on occupied land made a two-State solution less feasible. It was undeniable that the root cause of the conflict was the occupation, which had to end sooner rather than later. If peace was to be achieved, the world must prevail upon Israel to cease illegal settlements and dismantle existing ones. Sustained international pressure would be necessary to make Israel agree to a solution on the basis of established international parameters. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict had long been a major catalyst of instability and turmoil in the region. The Council had a Charter responsibility to secure peace and stability by addressing its root cause and negotiating a just solution.

GEIR O. PEDERSEN (Norway), welcoming Council resolution 2118 (2013) as an important milestone to address the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, said it would not end the war. The resolution should, thus, be a stepping stone towards stopping the bloodshed and finding a political solution. Norway urged the parties to participate in the planned Geneva II conference, which should build on the existing framework. The goal must be to reach agreement on a transitional body that could prepare for free elections and a democratic constitution. The world must not forget the suffering of millions of victims and the urgency of full, immediate, unfettered and unimpeded humanitarian access. On the Israeli-Palestinian talks, he urged both parties to make use of the opportunity and to agree on a solution within the parameters of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements. Only creation of a sovereign Palestinian State, in accordance with the principles of a two-State vision of peace, could provide Israel with internationally recognized and secure borders. Settlement activities must stop and all parties must refrain from provocations.

WILFRIED EMVULA (Namibia) said his delegation was greatly concerned that the Palestinian people continued to suffer under Israeli occupation and called for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He called on the international community to facilitate the creation of the Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders. Real and lasting progress on the question of Palestine could only be realized through the implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions. He reiterated his country's unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine and for full membership of Palestine in the United Nations and all its specialized agencies.

PALITHA KOHONA (Sri Lanka), supporting the statement by the Non-Aligned Movement, called for the urgent improvement of conditions faced by Palestinians. Their suffering was heightened by, among other factors, the Gaza blockade which had created an aid-dependent economy. Economic growth in 2012 was half the 2011 rate, while unemployment was high and wages low. In addition, 34 per cent of households were assessed as food insecure in 2012 and education was also compromised. There was an urgent humanitarian need to lift restrictions on imports and exports. The United Nations faced difficulties meeting Palestinians' needs, with UNRWA's funding difficulties reaching crisis point and its emergency appeal severely affected. In the West Bank, the intensity of search and arrest operations had increased, causing more civilian casualties. Israel had a duty to protect civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and should cease settlement activity to improve the situation on the ground and build confidence. Mindful of Israel's security needs, she underscored the fact that the overriding objective of negotiations was to secure a lasting peace and a fully sovereign Palestinian State.

ABDALLAH YAHYA A. AL-MOUALLIMI (Saudi Arabia) associated himself with the statements by OIC and the Non-Aligned Movement. He pointed to continued Israeli violations of international law and increased Palestinian suffering. United Nations resolutions were not being respected, which had negatively impacted regional, as well as global, peace and security. Israel continued a policy of colonization, violating holy sites while pursuing apartheid and ethnic cleansing. All of that was happening right in front of the Council, but it had done nothing. Despite the Organization's repeated denouncement of Israel's arbitrary practices, including last month following a briefing by Robert Serry, Israel had expedited the pace of violations against holy sites. The Council now must show more resolve and recognize the potential threat to international peace and security posed by the Israel-Palestine question.

The Syrian regime's continued extermination of its own people was characterized by the calm assumption that the Council would fail to respond, he said, pointing out that continued use of the veto was to blame. Even after the attack in Al-Ghouta, the Council's response was late and minimal, focusing on chemical weapons and over-simplifying the situation. It needed to act firmly, adopting necessary resolutions with the possibility of sanctions. Reminding the Council of its responsibilities, he turned then to the issue of the Conference on the Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East. In relation to arranging the Conference, the Council had failed in its duty, with 2013 ending and no hope for the Conference being held. He warned that peace lovers across the world might wonder about the validity of international resolutions if the international community was incapable of implementing basic resolutions that called for the holding of a conference.

KINGSLEY MAMABOLO (South Africa) said the fact the Middle East situation remained on the Council's agenda was a serious concern. Since 2000, the State of Palestine had written 473 letters to the Council, the Assembly and the Secretary-General on the crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Council must end its deafening silence and play its rightful role in pushing the two sides to finalize all outstanding issues. Palestinians had stayed the course to peacefully settle the conflict. Welcoming efforts by the United States Secretary of State, he said recent positive developments had yet to translate into progress on the ground, recalling illegal settlement activities and settler aggression. He welcomed reconciliation efforts among the Fatah, Hamas and other parties in Cairo in 2011, urging support for Palestine's economic initiative.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba), associating himself with the statement by the Non-Aligned Movement, said the region's instability stemmed from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. The Council must play its appropriate role and address Israel's consistent violations of United Nations resolutions. The Organization, which had granted the State of Palestine observer status, should go further and welcome it as a full Member State. Israel must end its illegal occupation and pave the way for a just and lasting solution. Only the end of settlements, the release of political prisoners and the end of the Gaza blockade would contribute to creating a climate for peace. Cuba was opposed to the use of any weapons of mass destruction. It supported the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Opposing a military solution to the conflict in Syria, he underlined the importance of the Council fostering genuine peace. He criticized the mass media for distorting reality and evading accountability, and stressed the need for a political solution to the conflict with full respect for Syria's independence and sovereignty.

ROBLE OLHAYE (Djibouti), speaking on behalf of OIC, said the agony, hardship, and hopelessness of the Syrian people continued unabated. The brutality experienced by the civilian population was unparalleled, with millions in makeshift refugee camps in neighbouring countries. There was no end in sight to the humanitarian catastrophe and all hopes were pinned on the renewed push for the long-delayed Geneva II conference. Turning to the issue of Palestine, he expressed grave concern over Israel's continued aggression against the Palestinian people and their land. Israel's illegal settlements and the apartheid, annexation wall undermined the continuity, unity and viability of the State of Palestine and jeopardized the prospects for the realization of the two-State solution. He expressed grave concern over the blockade on Gaza and the abuse of Palestinian prisoners in defiance of the will of the international community.

OIC called upon the international community, particularly the Council, to urgently uphold its responsibilities and further consider practical measures to end Israel's settlement policy. The international consensus to realize a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict required enforcement of international law and implementation of international resolutions, he said. The Council could not remain silent while a volatile and dangerous situation continued to escalate on the ground. Commending the latest United States initiative to reignite the peace process, he expressed hope that, this time around, it would produce realistic progress.

Israel's representative, taking the floor a second time, labelled it "truly absurd" to hear the representatives of tyrannies lecturing the region's only true democracy on religious rights. Saudi Arabia executed importers of Christian literature and banned non-Muslims from entering entire cities. Lebanon's representative had accused Israel of violating Council resolution 1701 (2006), yet violations of that resolution and the "blue line" from the Lebanese side had increased daily. Instead of standing guard, Lebanon was standing by while Hizbullah crossed the line. He called on Lebanon to tone down the rhetoric and turn up the heat on Hizbullah. Given that the Lebanese Government could not control Hizbullah from committing war crimes like hiding within and attacking civilian populations, it was audacious for them to criticize Israel. Noting also Lebanon's comments on Palestinian rights, he suggested Lebanon analyse the conditions within its own Palestinian refugee camps and the status of Palestinians within Lebanese society.

Responding to other States' criticism of Israel, he stressed that Gaza was not blockaded. Goods and aid could reach it through Israel. He addressed comments made by Syria's representative, claiming they were a smokescreen to distract from the atrocities that Government perpetrated against its own people. He also addressed the representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement who chose to ignore the crimes of their current Chair. They did so at their own peril, he stressed, noting that the Movement's Chair had actively supported the murderous regime in Damascus, which killed its own citizens including Palestinian refugees. Such hypocrisy from the Non-Aligned Movement had to stop.

The representative of Syria, also speaking again, said he had repeatedly warned against the danger of allowing the fundamental objective of the Council's discussion of the situation in the Middle East to slip. The objective was to address the situation in the territories occupied by Israel, not the situation in the neighbouring countries. The Council had adopted many resolutions calling for an end to occupation of Arab lands, but what steps had actually been taken to end that occupation, he asked. Some delegations had spoken of the plight of the Syrian people, ignoring the plight of the Syrians living under occupation.

The representative of the State of Palestine, also taking the floor a second time, said he was responding to the barrage of lies presented by Israel's representative. Israel was in no position to deliver lectures on morality, he said, calling on Israel's representative to show a single piece of evidence backing up his claim that documents given to the Council were based on lies. Israel's actions spoke for themselves in Jerusalem, he stressed, adding that the people sitting in the Council were not fools. Millions of Palestinians were prevented from exercising religious rights because they were prevented from visiting Jerusalem without permits.

The Israeli representative's statement was not congruent with an atmosphere of peace or advancing dialogue, but was rather the statement of someone looking for excuses to run away from what peace demanded, he said. A loud message had been sent to Israel's leaders to wake up from their denial and to act in accord with the requirements of peace. He was confident that international patience was running thin, and if Israel failed to negotiate in good faith and in line with international law, the Council would act decisively to ensure that peace would take root.

* * * * *