

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (spoke in Arabic):

At the outset, allow me once again to express to the President our appreciation for his wise leadership of the Security Council during this month and to wish you every success. I also wish to thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

It is also my pleasure to refer to the important statement delivered by His Excellency the President of the People's Republic of China before the Council of the League of Arab States at the beginning of the year, on 21 January, when he specifically called again for an end to the historical injustice done to the Palestinian people, referring also to the need to enable that people to exercise their right to establish their own sovereign Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We wish to express our appreciation for all the efforts by friendly China and for the President's efforts in that regard.

We meet today once again as Israel pursues its aggressive terrorist practices as well as its grave violations of international law. Israel persists in challenging international legitimacy, with no fear of sanctions or accountability. We have called on the Council again and again to compel Israel to end its war crimes and its violations of human rights, which it has been perpetrating despite the unanimity in the international community on the illegitimacy of Israel's colonialist policies and arbitrary practices against the Palestinian people. It seems that the Security Council remains timid vis-à-vis the need to end Israeli aggression, to make Israel responsible for that aggression and to make it accountable for its ongoing, repeated crimes against the Palestinian people. Israel continues to use excessive force against the Palestinian people. It has detained thousands of Palestinians. They are tortured, they are exploited, and many are simply being killed in the field. Despite its ongoing acts of terrorism, Israel now claims that it is committed to the two-State solution. We wonder: what two States are the occupier talking about? Settlements continue to be built without any restraint. Land and properties are being confiscated. Homes are being demolished. Families are being expelled. There are acts of forcible displacement. Does the Council not know, for example, that Israel took a decision to build 200 new settlements in the West Bank just days ago?

Israel continues to implement its illegal plans to annex the Holy City of Al-Quds, distorting its Arab identity, changing its demographic makeup and isolating it from the Palestinian community. It continues its ongoing attempts to change the legal status of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, wishing to lay its hands on Islamic and Christian properties in Al-Quds and Haram Al-Sharif. What two States is Israel talking about? Matters have reached a point where the Israeli occupation Government holds meetings in occupied Arab Syrian Golan, which is a grave development. The occupying Power is demanding that the international community recognize its occupation of the Golan. It claims that the Golan is an indivisible part of the State of Israel in the modern era, that the Golan Heights will remain in Israeli hands forever. That is a clear violation of resolution 497 (1981), as well as of all international instruments, which do not accept a change of status for occupied territories. We condemn in the strongest terms such declarations and such acts of aggression. We call upon the Council to compel Israel to implement all United Nations resolutions concerning its withdrawal from all Palestinian lands beyond the pre-1967 borders and all Arab occupied lands, including the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would once again like to welcome the French initiative to convene an international peace conference, as this would contribute to peace and security in the region, in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We must devise an effective international mechanism that ensures that an end is put to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine within a set time frame.

The Palestinian people have long suffered from a brutal occupation, policies of racism and arbitrary repression. We commend the Palestinian people for their steadfastness and for defending their people and their holy sites. We call on the Security Council to ensure that the Israeli Government bears criminal responsibility for its actions. Israel must be called upon to immediately release all detainees and prisoners and immediately respond to the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also reiterate our call to ensure a quick intervention so as to provide international protection to the Palestinian people. We appeal to the Security Council to respond in a manner that is commensurate with the gravity of the situation and to grant the Palestinian people their right to self-determination and their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the borders of June 1967.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wishes to express its grave concern at the continuing suffering of the brotherly Syrian people. Despite the efforts made to resolve the Syrian crisis; the adoption of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016); and the cessation of hostilities and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, with a view to the resumption of official negotiations on a political transition and the full implementation of Geneva I, these violations by the Syrian forces continue. Syrians are being killed and maimed on a daily basis. Their cities are being destroyed, including through the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects, including barrel bombs.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards are also present in Syria, as are Hizbullah militias, which are terrorist militias that have participated in the criminal acts perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its people. These represent grave continuing escalations that could have terrible repercussions on peace and security in the region and the entire world.

We would also like to express our grave concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. A siege continues to be imposed on many cities and regions, including Daraya, where dozens of women and children are protesting on their destroyed homes against the fact that international parties are ignoring them and will not act to lift the siege.

My delegation reiterates its support for the United Nations Envoy to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, within the mandate entrusted to him and resolution 2254 (2015), which set out the road map for official political negotiations on a political transition. We wish to stress that we will continue to support the Syrian people by all means available and to respect their decisions.

We call for the establishment of a transitional authority with full executive powers to build Syria's future. Syria, whose sons, whatever their political, religious or ethnic origins, reject terrorism and violence, has no place in it for those whose hands are stained with the blood of the Syrian people.

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