

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*):

We would like to thank you, Mr. President, and your delegation for having convened this extremely important open debate in the light of recent events and the persistent situation in the Middle East. We also express our gratitude to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. We convey our appreciation and support for his tireless efforts in the quest for just and sustainable political solutions that will help bring the conflict to an end and achieve peace in that tumultuous region.

Venezuela sees terrorism as one of the major threats and destabilizing elements in the region. In that regard, we categorically condemn all terrorist acts and groups, whoever its perpetrators may be and whatever its goals. Our statement will focus on the Palestinian question, as that protracted conflict continues to be a significant source of tension in the complicated panorama that prevails in that region.

Resolution 2334 (2016), of 23 December 2016, which condemns the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by my country at the end of our term in the Security Council as a non-permanent member, and has undoubtedly contributed to bringing to the attention of the international community the terrible impact of the occupation of Palestinian territory on the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children whose daily lives and most fundamental rights are compromised by the illegal Israeli policies, the occupying Power, which arrogantly and cruelly oppresses them and denies them their right to exist in a sovereign, independent and viable State.

In that context, we regret the violent, threatening and arrogant reaction of the Israeli Government to resolution 2334 (2016). Instead of heeding and complying with the Council's resolutions and mandates, as called for in the Charter of the United Nations, that Government continues to defy the international community, declaring that there will be more settlements and threatening those countries that continue to insist on the two-State solution and on compliance with international law.

Nevertheless, Venezuela hopes that the Security Council will continue to do its utmost to achieve the effective implementation of that crucially important resolution, which includes the requirement that Israel immediately and totally cease all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that measures be adopted to safeguard the Palestinian people from the continued violations of international law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, which have been occurring for 50 years, and in the Gaza Strip, which for almost 10 years has been subject to an inhumane and brutal blockade by Israel.

The two-State solution continues to be the only possible way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, we welcome France's diplomatic efforts, which culminated in the convening of 70 countries on 15 January at the Paris Middle East Peace Conference, in which Venezuela participated with the strong desire to join its voice with others who called for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict, based on the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine — as a full-fledged United Nations Member and with East Jerusalem as its capital — living in peace within secure and internationally recognized pre-1967 borders. We note the total consistency between the points agreed in the joint statement adopted at the Paris Conference and the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which shows that the Council's document fully reflects the concerns of the international community regarding the conflict and its willingness to seek short-term solutions that do not eliminate the possibility of reaching a political solution in the form of a two-State solution.

We also commend the fact that the statement adopted in Paris noted the importance of providing ongoing financial support to the Palestinian Authority so that it can build the necessary infrastructure for a viable Palestinian economy. We welcome the goodwill of the States and organizations that attended the Conference, and we reiterate our support for that collective effort to achieve peace in the Middle East, as well as the work of the Middle East Quartet and initiatives from countries like Egypt and Russia that seek to promote political processes and conversations between Israel and Palestine, with a view to reaching agreements on the basis of the two-State solution, which should take into account the Arab Peace Initiative, the terms adopted at the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

We believe that Israel must stop turning its back on international law and we demand that it do so. Israel must heed the calls of so many in the international community for the resumption of an open and honest political discussion with the Palestinian Authority based on the existence of two States in order to initiate a process that will put an end to the tragedy of the Palestinian people, that will put an end to the illegal occupation of its territory, and that will put an end to one of the greatest abuses committed against a people in the contemporary history of the world.

Venezuela is waiting for Israel to listen. Venezuela expects Israel to cease its arrogance and violence. Venezuela expects and demands that Israel shall cease to violate the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, including more than 700 children in

Israeli prisons. Not only do we reiterate the importance and the need for the members of the Organization and the Security Council, the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to remain attentive to future developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to be an element of support and assistance for the parties as they

search for peace, but we do so with special emphasis on the importance of defending the weaker party, namely, the occupied Palestinian people.

In this way, we will ensure that agreements resulting from resolutions, declarations, discussions and multilateral and direct negotiations go beyond the population in question and open the way in 2017, “the year of peace”, in the words of Secretary-General António Guterres, for the end of the occupation, in accordance with resolution 242 (1967), and the emergence of a Palestinian State on an equal footing with all the nations of the world.