



Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

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Tuesday, 22 October 2013, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Mehdiyev	(Azerbaijan)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Sahebzada Ahmed Khan
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Gasana
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.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 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Cuba, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 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 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.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Carl Hallergard, First Counsellor of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: The Council meets today at a moment of heightened Middle East diplomacy. Discussions are ongoing on both immediate crises and long-standing sources of tensions in the region, from the Syria catastrophe to the Middle East peace process to questions regarding nuclear proliferation. We believe that last month's general debate in the General Assembly in New York reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations as a forum for engagement between States and for real diplomatic progress when there is international unity as opposed to division. While the challenges on each front should not be underestimated, it is important to maintain and even increase the momentum behind diplomacy. We encourage and remain committed to supporting the Security Council and its members in fully exploring all the opportunities at hand to resolve peacefully, through dialogue, the difficult issues that bedevil peace and security in the region.

Central to many statements by world leaders in the general debate was the urgent importance of shaping more favourable dynamics across the region and addressing the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The test will be whether and at what pace current efforts can be sustained and gain traction in response to such concerns and expectations. Many have acknowledged the opportunity at this juncture to save the two-State solution and realize the vision of a viable independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel.

On 27 September, for the first time in 17 months, the Quartet principals met in New York. They were joined by the Israeli and Palestinian chief negotiators for a joint briefing on the progress of the negotiations. Minister Livni and Mr. Erekat reiterated their personal and official commitment to reaching a comprehensive permanent status agreement, and asked for the Quartet and the international community's support. Both stressed that their shared objective is to end the conflict, based on a vision of two States for two peoples.

The Quartet reaffirmed its determination to lend effective support to their efforts during the prescribed time frame. Acknowledging the leadership of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the Quartet commended their efforts and their commitment to remaining engaged in the negotiations. Quartet partners stressed the importance of reversing negative trends on the ground in order to advance the direct talks. The Representative of the Quartet, Tony Blair, briefed

the group on the Palestinian Economic Initiative, which aims to bring transformative economic growth to the Palestinian economy, running in parallel with the renewed negotiations. The Quartet discussed the humanitarian needs of Gaza's residents and emphasized the importance of increased access to Gaza through legal crossings, while welcoming recent steps taken by Israel in that regard.

In discussing the importance of international support for the negotiations, the Quartet commended the League of Arab States for its constructive role and recognized that many others in the international community have made important contributions. The Quartet envoys will meet again soon as part of their now monthly meetings to report on progress. Since the Quartet meeting, negotiators have picked up the pace of talks and have stated their commitment to abiding by the understanding of not revealing the contents of such discussions. It is encouraging to see an intensified dialogue that demonstrates that both sides are taking ownership.

On 25 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians met at the ministerial level and expressed its full support for the ongoing peace negotiations. The Secretary-General called on donors to step up efforts to assist the Palestinian Authority, stressing that

“[t]he situation is volatile and the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory is not sustainable. In the long run, the occupation is deeply damaging to both Israelis and Palestinians”.

Most participants welcomed the positive gestures announced by Israel, including the easing of restrictions, as yielding visible improvements on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Despite the welcome intensification of negotiations, there have been worrisome developments on the ground that we cannot ignore. I wish to reiterate the unequivocal call by the United Nations on all to refrain from violence and incitement, reinforce calm and reverse negative trends in order to preserve the tentative opening in the political process.

During the reporting period, Palestinians shot and killed two Israeli soldiers in apparently unrelated incidents on 20 and 22 September. President Abbas publicly condemned the incidents, and Israeli and Palestinian security officials held coordination meetings to prevent an escalation of violence. Palestinians injured

seven Israeli soldiers, including one on 17 October when a Palestinian attacked an Israeli military base with a bulldozer prior to being shot dead. Israeli security forces carried out a total of 334 operations. One resulted in the killing of an Islamic Jihad militant in the Jenin refugee camp. Demonstrations, including some against the barrier, resulted in numerous injuries. During the reporting period, Israeli forces injured at least 290 Palestinians, including 114 children and two women. A total of 311 Palestinians were arrested.

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) reported numerous incidents of stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at both civilian and military targets. It announced the arrest of Palestinian terror suspects and the confiscation of weapons and improvised explosive devices. Palestinian security forces, continuing their work to maintain security in the West Bank, safely defused three unexploded devices. Intra-Palestinian clashes with armed militants during a large security operation on 5 October in Jenin refugee camp resulted in several injuries, including to Palestinian security personnel, and about 100 arrests.

Settlement activity is an obstacle to peace and against international law. Clashes between Palestinians and settlers were also ongoing. In an incident still under investigation, a Palestinian beat to death one Israeli settler, a retired IDF colonel, in the Jordan Valley on 11 October. In another Palestinian attack, five Israeli settlers were injured, including a nine-year old girl, on 5 October in the settlement of Psagot near Ramallah.

Israeli settlers injured eight Palestinians, including three children. So-called price tag attacks included the desecration in two instances of tombstones in Christian cemeteries in Jerusalem and a mosque in the Palestinian village of Burqa on 10 October. On 6 October, Israeli security forces reported the arrest of 14 Israeli minors from Jerusalem, allegedly involved in such attacks in recent months.

Multiple incidents of settler attacks against Palestinian farmers and orchards damaged over 1,080 trees and saplings. This is of particular concern given that the olive-picking season — a source of livelihood for thousands of Palestinians — is currently under way. We welcome the enhanced efforts of the Israeli military in recent years to provide protection for Palestinian farmers and facilitate access to their olive groves at this time of year, and we urge that such efforts be expanded year round.

In a worrying development, clashes broke out on the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount between Israelis and Palestinian worshippers, in what Palestinians see as growing provocations on that holy site. This drew sharp criticism, including from the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. Incitement from any quarter must cease and the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths must be respected.

The demolition of a total of 58 structures — the third such incident of collective demolitions in recent months — displaced the 48-member Bedouin community of Kfar Makhoul. On 3 October, the Israeli military demolished the tents subsequently established by the community, some with assistance provided by international humanitarian agencies. Such incidents reinforce the United Nations conviction that Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime so as not to be compelled to resort to the building of structures without an Israeli permit, which leads to demolitions. We also remind Israel of its obligations to facilitate humanitarian assistance to communities in need.

We welcome the recent implementation by the IDF of some of UNICEF's recommendations from its March 2013 report "Children in Israeli military detention". We encourage further measures to improve the treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military custody.

The calm in the Gaza Strip is showing worrying signs of erosion. On 13 October, the IDF announced that it had uncovered a mile-long tunnel constructed with slabs of concrete, from Gaza into Israel — the third tunnel discovered in a year. Hamas senior leadership claimed responsibility for the construction, suggesting its potential use for kidnapping operations to facilitate the release of Palestinian prisoners. We condemn the construction of such tunnels, which are in violation of the November 2012 ceasefire understanding. The use of hundreds of tons of cement in the construction of the tunnel, when cement is critically needed for civilian goals in Gaza, is also deeply disturbing. Furthermore, in rejecting Hamas' stated justification for the tunnel, the United Nations continues to reject any incitement to violence or attempted denial of Israel's right to exist.

In another violation of the November ceasefire understanding, Palestinians launched a total of five rockets and one mortar shell into Israel, resulting in no injuries or damage, while another nine rockets reportedly dropped into Gaza. Israel conducted seven incursions into the Gaza Strip. Israeli forces shot one Palestinian militant dead on 30 September and injured

another on 17 September. Three Palestinian civilians were reportedly injured by Israeli live fire in the border area.

Following the tunnel discovery, the Government of Israel temporarily suspended the transfer of construction material through the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza. We fully recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns, but we remind Israeli officials of the needs of Gaza's residents, including for construction material for civilian use that must enter Gaza through legal crossings. The people of Gaza are suffering from the rise in food insecurity, a significant energy problem affecting the health, water and sanitation sectors, and restrictions imposed on movement of people for medical and educational reasons, with Rafah crossing open for 16 out of 36 days during this period.

We are grateful for Turkey's donation of \$850,000 to the Palestinian Authority for the purchase of fuel to generate electricity for essential health and sanitation services in Gaza, to be implemented with United Nations assistance. While longer-term engagement will be needed to address structural issues affecting service provision to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, this is a welcome stopgap measure to provide a safety net and mitigate the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Turkey also donated 10,000 metric tons of flour to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — a critical contribution to the Agency's emergency food assistance.

On 2 October, a man convicted of murder was executed in Gaza. The United Nations position against such executions is well-known.

At a complex juncture for the Middle East, we remind Member States that UNRWA continues to face serious financial difficulties. A deficit of \$48 million in its budget for education, health and poverty mitigation work threatens the provision of essential services to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In a special meeting chaired by the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on 26 September, participants agreed to sustain and increase support to the agency. Reports of Palestine refugees fleeing Syria being lost in boat that capsized off Egypt, and an increase in the death toll of Palestinian refugees in Syria from the escalation of fighting in Dera'a, Yarmouk and other camps in Rif Damascus, underline the urgent need to address the extreme vulnerability of Palestinian

refugees in the current conflict and thereby uphold the promise of sustained engagement with UNWRA.

In Lebanon, security continues to be affected by cross-border shelling and shooting from Syria, leading to the injury of at least three soldiers on 28 September. President Sleiman condemned a missile attack by a Syrian helicopter on the border town of Aarsal on 7 October. Progress has been made in the investigations into the bomb attacks in the southern suburbs of Beirut on 15 August and in Tripoli on 23 August, leading to several arrests. The Lebanese army and security forces deployed heavily around the southern suburbs of Beirut to assume security responsibility in place of Hizbullah, and also in Tripoli. In a welcome development, nine Lebanese pilgrims who had been held in captivity for 17 months in Syria were released on 19 October and returned to Lebanon. At the same time, two Turkish pilots who had been abducted on 9 August in Beirut were also released.

In the light of the multiple impacts of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon, on 25 September on the margins of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General convened the inaugural meeting to launch the International Support Group for Lebanon. The high-level meeting reaffirmed international support for Lebanon's stability and policy of disassociation, for President Sleiman and for the institutions of the State, and encouraged assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces, refugees, host communities, and the Lebanese Government. We anticipate an expansion of the International Support Group to embrace additional countries and organizations that share the goal of helping Lebanon, and we welcome the World Bank's recent meeting on Lebanon.

The tragedy in Syria continues to test our collective resolve and ability to end the violence there. While important progress has been made on the chemical weapons file, it will by no means bring an end by itself to the appalling suffering of the Syrian people. The Secretary-General continues to insist that the only way to bring peace to Syria is an inclusive and Syrian-led political process.

We are working hard to convene the Geneva conference in mid-November. Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi is in the region on a tour that will include visits to Syria and key States that can bring influence to bear on the prospects for peace. I myself returned late last week from visits to London and Moscow, where the focus was on convening the Geneva conference. The

conference will aim to help the Syrian sides launch a political process, which would lead to an agreement on how to fully implement the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex) and establish by consent a new transitional governing body with full executive authority. We highly value the Security Council's strong support to that effort, as reflected in resolution 2118 (2013), of 27 September.

We are working at all levels and hope that a common vision for a political solution can soon emerge among the Syrians, in the region and globally. We continue to call on all who truly wish to work for peace and a new democratic Syria to focus not on military actions or transferring arms to either side of the conflict but, rather, on ensuring the holding and the success of the Geneva conference. With a political process, however difficult it may be, there is hope that a new Syria will emerge. Without it, there is little on the horizon but the further destruction of Syria and the further destabilization of the region as a result of the conflict.

The situation in the Golan continues to be volatile, with ongoing heavy clashes between the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and armed members of the opposition occurring inside the area of separation, jeopardizing the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. On 9 October, the Israel Defense Forces informed the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that Syrian artillery fire had hit an IDF position, wounding two IDF soldiers, and that the IDF was going to retaliate. UNDOF asked the IDF not to take such action, and also asked Syrian authorities to stop the Syrian Arab Armed Forces from firing towards the ceasefire line to prevent escalation between the two sides. Subsequently, the IDF fired at a Syrian position in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, wounding two Syrian soldiers. Upon inspection of the location, UNDOF observed the impact of artillery fire on the Alpha side.

In conclusion, let me return to where I started, with an acknowledgment of the emerging opportunities for diplomacy before us across a range of issues that foment tension across an interconnected region. On the Middle East peace process, we should do all we can to take advantage of the opening that now exists. That can only help the Palestinian and Israeli people, and the entire region. After 20 years of talks and too many negative developments on the ground, we do not need lengthy negotiations. What we and the parties need are decisions — the right decisions — and leaders who are committed to usher in an agreed political solution. The

United Nations, through the Quartet, alongside broader engagement with all the relevant partners, stands ready to contribute to what we all so fervently hope to see come to fruition, that is, the creation of two States for two peoples living side by side in peace and security. 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.

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): At the outset, Sir, I congratulate Azerbaijan on its presidency of the Security Council this month under your able leadership. We also express appreciation for Australia's skilled leadership of the Council during the month of September. I also thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

When we addressed the Security Council at the most recent open debate, in July (see S/PV.7007), we appealed to the international community to act upon its political, legal and moral obligations towards the question of Palestine and Palestinian-Israeli peace. We stressed the need for meaningful steps to support the peace process towards the fulfillment of the decades-long promise to assist the Palestinian people to realize their rights and justice, including a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees, and to realize their freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders — the foundation of peace in the Middle East.

Our message to the Council and our calls for action to salvage peace prospects remain as urgent today as prior to the launch of direct negotiations between the parties nearly three months ago, on 29 July. If the situation persists as is, marked by Israeli impunity and recklessness, yet another opportunity to make peace a reality will be lost.

This must be a matter of concern for the Council and international community as a whole. Support for peace negotiations, as resoundingly pledged just weeks ago from the General Assembly rostrum, and by the Quartet in its most recent statement, whereby it "reaffirmed its determination to actively support the pursuit of a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict" (see SG/2202), requires

more than just commending the decision to resume negotiations and encouraging perseverance. It requires meaningful action to help the parties overcome the persistent obstacles, including by ensuring respect for the parameters of the solution, on which there is international consensus, towards the actual achievement of a final peace agreement.

In September, before the General Assembly, President Mahmoud Abbas reaffirmed in the clearest terms the abiding Palestinian commitment to a peaceful, negotiated solution, based on the parameters enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. He stressed, *inter alia*, that

"The goal of the peace that we seek is defined and the objective of the negotiations is clear to all, just as the terms of reference and the basis and foundations of the peace process and of the agreement we seek are longstanding and within reach." (A/68/PV.12, p. 26)

Moreover, he reconfirmed our readiness to engage in good faith in the negotiations, stressing

"I assure Members that we shall respect all of our commitments and foster the atmosphere most conducive to continuing the negotiations seriously and intensively, while providing guarantees for its success and aiming at a peace agreement within nine months." (*supra*)

The State of Palestine is upholding that commitment and acting with seriousness of purpose in pursuit of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations. We have conducted ourselves with the utmost responsibility, in line with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions, including of the Security Council, fully cognizant of the high risks and consequences entailed in the failure to seize the small opportunity that remains for realizing the two-State solution.

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. We have done so despite the hardships being endured by the Palestinian people under occupation and despite the challenges faced by our Government in addressing the needs of our people under such conditions, including the deliberate impairment of our capabilities to meet

their needs and to allay their concerns regarding both their daily subsistence and their future.

At this juncture, we reaffirm our gratitude for all efforts made by the international community in support of the negotiations and the goal of peace. We recognize the efforts and leadership of the United States, as well as the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — as members of the Quartet — by the ministerial committee of the League of Arab States and by all other concerned States from around the world. Moreover, we recognize the efforts of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the support of the donor community, and we stress the importance of such assistance to Palestine for alleviating the negative impact of the occupation and the ongoing financial crisis on our people and our Government institutions.

However, despite the genuine efforts being exerted, tangible progress remains elusive and hopes are diminishing, as the challenging situation on the ground persists and provocative Israeli actions and declarations undermine the spirit and intent of the negotiations.

The Security Council must be aware of the vastly negative impact that unlawful Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — the territory that constitutes the State of Palestine — are having on the ground and on the Palestinian conviction in the fairness of the political process and the potential for its success. Illegal and provocative Israeli actions, whether by the Government, its occupying forces or its extremist settlers, are raising deep doubts about Israel's true intentions in the negotiations, reinforcing the notion that it is only using this period to further entrench its settlement enterprise and de facto annexation of Palestinian land, while simultaneously attempting to ease international pressure in that regard.

Over the past months, Israel has continued its settlement activities, in grave breach of international law, total contradiction to the objectives and spirit of the negotiations and flagrant disregard of the global calls for cessation. Moreover, it has done so with full knowledge that those illegal actions are further undermining the contiguity of the Palestinian territory and the viability of the two-State solution and aggravating already high tensions.

Since the resumption of negotiations, Israel has advanced the approval of over 3,000 settlement units and the confiscation of hundreds more dunums of

Palestinian land, in addition to a barrage of provocations and incitement, including by Cabinet officials and Knesset members. In that regard, we refer to a report by the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now, which exposed, among other things, a 70 per cent rise in the construction of settlements in the first half of this year.

Such illegal actions and tactics must be rejected by the international community, which must remain vigilant in its calls for a full halt to all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The international consensus on that issue must remain firm. We furthermore call on all States to pursue measures to cease and prohibit any support to settlement activities, in fulfilment of their obligations under international humanitarian law.

We also recall in that regard the responsibilities undertaken by the Quartet members, and highlight the call, made in its 27 September statement, for

“all parties to take every possible step to promote conditions conducive to the success of the negotiating process and to refrain from actions that undermine trust or prejudice final status issues.”
(*see SG/2202*)

The Quartet also stressed the need for actions by all the parties concerned, consistent with and supportive of that call.

In that regard, we also draw the Council's immediate attention to the dangers arising from constant Israeli provocations and acts of aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, particularly at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque. Such actions, particularly by Israeli settlers and Jewish extremists, have escalated and are dramatically fuelling tensions. We condemn and reject all reckless attempts to inflame religious confrontation, which would have grave consequences for the region and wider international community, endangering international peace and security. We call on the Security Council to closely monitor developments in Jerusalem and to act responsibly, in line with its Charter duty, to demand a halt to all such incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric and to avert a further destabilization of that critical situation.

In addition to the illegal measures being carried out in connection with Israel's settlement campaign — whether the construction of settlements and the wall, the confiscation of land, the forced displacement of civilians, the demolition of homes

or the constant terror, violence and destruction being perpetrated by Israeli settlers — Israel, the occupying Power, also persists with its collective punishment and systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people. Military raids, excessive force against civilians, including peaceful protesters, the arrest and detention of more civilians, including children, and the abuse and maltreatment of the thousands of Palestinians who remain captive in Israeli prisons and detention centres continue unabated. Moreover, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remains of grave concern, as Israel's illegal blockade, now well into its sixth year, continues in collective punishment of the entire population, exacerbating poverty, widespread socioeconomic ills and despair.

We therefore reiterate to the international community two calls in particular. We call for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population in accordance with humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention — an obligation long-acknowledged yet unfulfilled. And we call for the lifting of that inhumane blockade on our people and for the sustained opening of the Gaza Strip crossings to allow for the normal movement of persons and goods, in accordance with humanitarian law as well as past agreements between the parties.

It is against that backdrop that peace talks continue — an environment hardly conducive to the pursuit of peace. Yet, the Palestinian side remains committed to the goals of peace, justice and coexistence. We stress that peace and justice are two sides of the same coin, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. We are prepared to undertake our responsibilities to resolve all final status issues — Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners — for the achievement of a just, lasting peace and the independence of a sovereign, contiguous, viable and democratic State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

For a credible process to be sustained, however, the reality on the ground must be redressed. Serious efforts are needed to close the wide gap between that reality and the hopes, expectations and requirements for a successful political process. Israel must show in word and deed that it is willing and able to uphold its responsibilities and legal obligations and act forthwith, both at the negotiating table and on the ground, to make peace possible. That obviously necessitates an

end to all of the illegal, destructive policies of the military occupation. The international community must be unrelenting in that demand. The alternative is a continued rise of tensions and instability, sabotaging the final opportunity to realize the two-State solution, an alternative that we, along with the international community, clearly seek to avert.

In conclusion, I am compelled to reiterate our grave concerns about the situation of the Palestine refugees in Syria. All are aware of the horrific impact of the conflict on the civilian population in Syria, including the Palestine refugees, and the massive suffering being endured. We call again for intensive efforts, including by the Security Council, to ensure the protection of all civilians and to promote a political solution to the conflict as rapidly as possible.

We stress that the vulnerability of the Palestine refugees stems directly from the failure to resolve the problem for over six decades, due to Israel's deliberate denial of their rights, a fact that reinforces the imperative of a just solution for their plight in the context of any final peace agreement and regional peace. Until that day comes, we recognize the extraordinary efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and all humanitarian organizations working in Syria and the neighbouring countries to aid and alleviate the suffering of the refugees and displaced persons in this time of crisis.

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

Mr. Prozor (Israel): Winston Churchill, one of the architects of the Organization, is remembered for his speeches that rallied a nation in the dark hours of the Second World War. His words inspired a generation when he told the British people, "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty [so] men will still say 'This was their finest hour'". And indeed it was their finest hour. They stood tall knowing that if they did not stand up for human life and human dignity, their very survival would be at stake. It was a lesson for the ages, and today they are remembered as a beacon of light during some of the darkest days that the world has ever known. With much of the Middle East in turmoil, the world is once again being called upon to defend liberty, democracy

and human rights. History will look back and judge which nations stepped forward with conviction, conscience and courage.

This morning, I would like to speak about those three qualities, beginning with conviction. As the political landscape of the Middle East evolves, the international community must demonstrate resolve. Last month, Iran's new President, Mr. Hassan Rouhani, took centre stage at the General Assembly. He arrived in New York on a charm offensive, waving to excited fans with one hand while waving off sceptics with the other. Since his election, Rouhani has tried to reinforce the image that he is a moderate. He was published in an American newspaper, appeared on network television and even started using social media.

I have news for President Rouhani — embracing Twitter does not make him a reformer, but embracing human rights certainly would. The Iranian regime is notorious for violating women's rights, targeting religious and ethnic minorities, and denying fundamental freedoms to its citizens. Rouhani is like the Emperor with new clothes, cloaking himself as a moderate when Iranian radicalism remains clear to the naked eye.

Unlike his predecessor, whose hateful rhetoric about wiping Israel off the map made him easy to dismiss, the new Iranian President has a strategy code-named "SLY" — S-L-Y — Smile, Lie and Yield minor concessions. Rouhani has perfected the art of saying one thing and doing another. But you do not have to believe me, Mr. President; you can read about it in his 2011 memoir describing his time as Iran's chief negotiator. Here in his own words is what he said:

"While we were talking to the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment in Isfahan ... By creating a calm environment, we were able to complete the work in Isfahan."

While Rouhani provides diplomatic cover, Iran is marching towards a bomb. Since the June election, Iran has installed thousands of new centrifuges, and just last month, the new president declared that Iran will not give up one iota of its nuclear rights. Make no mistake — the Iranian programme is not for peaceful purposes. Seventeen different countries peacefully produce nuclear energy without uranium enrichment or plutonium production, and yet Iran insists that its enrichment infrastructure and technology are its right. It is not Iran's right; in fact, it is wrong.

When negotiating with Iran, the international community must, as Prime Minister Netanyahu said, distrust, dismantle and verify. Everyone, including Israel, wants to find a diplomatic solution. But one has to wonder why Israel and a minority of other countries are the only ones standing on the front line warning the world that an Iran with nuclear weapons does not threaten Israel alone. It threatens the entire region, from Saudi Arabia through the Gulf States to Morocco. Their voices are harder to hear, but if one tunes into the right frequency, one discovers that they are frightened. They know that if Iran gets nuclear weapons, it will threaten their lives and lives throughout the region. It will not just alter the balance of power in the Middle East. The repercussions will be felt in Europe, the United States and across the globe.

The world has stood at this crossroads before. On the eve of the Second World War, Churchill warned of the impending danger when he said,

"They should know that we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged... This is only the beginning of the reckoning ... [unless] we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in olden time."

Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past and leave a minority to stand alone against a common enemy. The danger is real, but this is not the first time that Israel's warnings have been brushed aside.

When we warned the world about Al-Assad's chemical arsenal, we were told, "Do not worry, he will not use chemical weapons because that would not be rational". Today the entire world knows that the dictator in Damascus used chemical weapons against his own citizens. And the only reason that Al-Assad has agreed to give up those weapons is the very real threat of an American military strike. One does not need a PhD in physics to know that pressure works.

The Iranian economy is crumbling under the weight of crippling sanctions, and that pressure is getting results. Yet some States have suggested easing the sanctions. That suggestion reminds me of a boxer who is clinging to the ropes in the final round. Give him a moment to rest and he will turn around and attack with more vigour. We must keep up the pressure until Iran agrees to play by the rules. Let me be clear — any sort of partial deal will be completely ineffective in containing the Iranian threat. Any diplomatic resolution

must ensure that Iran has no centrifuges, no enriched uranium and no plutonium track. If Iran does not agree, then the sanctions must not be eased; they should be increased.

Now is the time to demonstrate conviction. We cannot allow the world's most dangerous weapons to reach the hands of the most dangerous actors. The Security Council showed its resolve when it adopted a series of resolutions against Iran. Having come so far and worked so hard, now is not the time to give in. Iran cannot be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons.

The second quality I want to speak about is conscience. We have all seen the horrific images that have emerged from Syria: men and women sprawled on the floor convulsing, young children foaming at the nose and mouth and then lying motionless. No one with a conscience can stand by as the people of Syria continue to be massacred, whether by chemical weapons or the routine brutality of the Al-Assad regime.

The cynics in this Chamber will accuse Israel of shedding crocodile tears. The Jewish people and the State of Israel know all too well how evil can prevail when people shut their eyes and turn their backs. To the Syrian people I want to say, here and now — “I know that our two nations have a long history of conflict and that we are separated by politics and religion. But we are eternally linked by our common humanity. We are horrified by the pain and suffering that you have endured. As we speak, our hand is extended to your people. And we will continue to offer humanitarian assistance to all those who need it regardless of race, religion or gender.”

It is hard for most of us to conceive that anyone, much less a Government, would use chemical weapons against its own innocent civilians. Is it logical? Is it rational? Not at all. Many in this Chamber said that countries would never use weapons of mass destruction. Surprise, surprise — it turns out one cannot apply rational thinking to irrational players.

How many in this Chamber believed that when Bashar Al-Assad became President, he would be the new hope for Western-Arab relations? After all, here was a young London-trained ophthalmologist, with a beautiful wife, who drank high tea and ate scones at the Ritz. It turns out the eye doctor is just another spin doctor and his murderous rampage has Syria spinning out of control.

We applaud the steps that have been taken by the international community so far, but the removal and destruction of Syria's weapons must remain a priority. The international community must ensure that the process is properly monitored, verified and completed while abiding by the agreed timelines. It must also ensure that no entity takes advantage of the process to advance its capacities and knowledge of chemical weapons.

Let me be absolutely clear. We cannot trust that a regime that lies in bed with Iran and Hizbullah is not lying when it commits itself to eliminating its deadly arsenal. Together, Iran, Syria and Hizbullah form the trio of terror. The trio is intent on acquiring the ABCs of terrorism — atomic, biological and chemical weapons — so it can more effectively murder innocent men, women and children. The clock is ticking and time is running out. Our conscience tells us that the sooner Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons is destroyed, the sooner we will safeguard the people of Syria and bring greater stability to the Middle East.

The problems plaguing the Middle East are centuries old and, contrary to what some in this Chamber believe, cannot be solved overnight. How many here thought that the so-called Arab Spring would bring about democracy? I am reminded of the lyrics of Leonard Cohen's song “Democracy”: “It's coming from the feel that this ain't exactly real, or it's real, but it ain't exactly there.” Leonard Cohen could have written this song to describe the Middle East today. The promise of democracy in the Middle East “ain't exactly real and it ain't exactly there”. The region continues to be defined by bloodshed, repression and instability.

This brings me to the third quality I want to speak about, and that is courage. We all want to see peace in the Middle East. Israel welcomes the resumption of the negotiations. Israel desires peace and is committed to serious and meaningful negotiations with a positive outcome. Israelis envision the day when we can live free from divisions, hatred and violence. But making peace requires courage. It requires leaders courageous enough to embrace partnership and promote tolerance.

On the very same day that CNN beamed images of Mahmoud Abbas talking about peace at the United Nations, official Palestinian television delivered a very different message. The Palestinian Authority and Fatah held ceremonies to honour terrorists responsible for the murder and maiming of innocent Israelis. At

a memorial held in Ramallah, a Fatah official read a speech on behalf of Abbas, praising terrorist Abu Sukkar who killed 15 Israelis and wounded more than 60. This murderer was described as “the most noble among the noble”. At another event on the same day, a member of Abbas’s Fatah’s Central Committee glorified terrorist Dalal Mughrabi, who hijacked a bus and killed 37 civilians, 12 of whom were children. This attack was described as “the glorious deed of a hero”.

Examples of incitement are all too easy to find in Palestinian society. Their results can be found in the death of Gal Kobi, who was shot in the neck by a Palestinian terrorist last month. They can be found in the death of Tomer Hazan, who was kidnapped and murdered by a Palestinian acquaintance. They can be found in the death of Seraiah Ofer, who was brutally beaten to death outside his home by Palestinian men wielding metal bars and axes. As horrific as these crimes are, President Abbas only found his voice to condemn these attacks to a Jewish audience in New York City, while speaking in English. We have yet to hear President Abbas condemn these attacks in his native Arabic, speaking to his own people.

The time has come for the Palestinian leadership to clearly and unequivocally condemn violence and terrorism. The time has come to stop poisoning the minds of Palestinian children. The time has come to start teaching tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence ; after all, the next peace agreement will depend on the next generation wanting peace.

For years, Member States have been listening to debates on the Middle East. In all this time, have they ever heard a Palestinian representative say anything constructive about Israel? No. We only hear demonization and delegitimization. It is time to stop the blame game. The United Nations library will have to open a new fiction section for the countless letters sent to the Security Council by the Palestinian representative, distorting the truth. We need to speak truthfully about the problems plaguing the Middle East. It seems that those States which are so heavy on the criticism of Israel are also light on the facts. Allow me to dispel a number of myths.

Myth number one — some nations seem to believe that a great injustice was done to the Palestinian people when the United Nations voted to partition then-British mandate Palestine into two States. In fact, in 1947 resolution 181 (II) of the General Assembly, which

divided the British mandate over Palestine, speaks of the creation of a Jewish State no fewer than 25 times. The resolution declared that “independent Arab and Jewish States... shall come into existence”. The Jews welcomed the plan and joyously declared a new State in their ancient homeland. But the Arabs rejected the plan and, joined by the armies of five Arab nations, launched a war of annihilation against the newly born Jewish state.

Sixty-five years later, we still do not hear the Palestinians talk about two States for two peoples. Sure, Palestinian leaders call for an independent Palestinian State, but they insist that the Palestinian people return to the Jewish State. This is a euphemism for the destruction of the State of Israel and a major hurdle to peace.

Myth number two — some in this Chamber are convinced that the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the settlements. In fact, from the time Israel gained its independence in 1948 until 1967, the West Bank was in Jordanian hands and Gaza was in Egyptian hands. Throughout this time, there was not a single settlement. Yet the Palestinians still sought our destruction. And where were the Arab States? They did not lift a finger to create a Palestinian State and instead sought our destruction. Today, just 2 per cent of the Israeli population lives in settlements, but they are blamed for 100 per cent of the problems. I have said it before and I will say it again — the settlements are not the major hurdle to peace; the real obstacle to peace is the Palestinians quest for the so-called right of return.

Myth number three — the Palestinian delegation has sent letters to the Council accusing Israel of denying people freedom of worship. The only denying taking place is the denial of facts on the ground. One of the first acts Israel undertook after reuniting Jerusalem in 1967 was to abolish discriminatory laws and safeguard access to religious sites for people of all faiths. This was in contrast to pre-1967, when everyone but Jews could access Jerusalem. Since Israel introduced religious freedoms in 1967, people of all faiths have been able to visit the holy sites of Jerusalem.

In contrast, the Palestinian leadership breeds incitement and stirs up violence on the Temple Mount. They even went so far as to accuse Israel of altering the nature of Jerusalem. In fact, it is the Palestinians who are altering the nature of Jerusalem; they are destroying artefacts and distorting history in an effort

to erase all traces of an ancient Jewish presence. The world's silence in response to these crimes has been deafening. Ever since King David laid the cornerstone for his palace 3,000 years ago, Jerusalem has served and will continue to serve as the eternal capital of the Jewish people.

Instead of accusing Israel of restricting freedom of movement, the Palestinians should be concerned with holding free elections. Let me remind the Council that Abbas's term expired in 2009. Since then he has been extending his term without holding elections.

Where are all the concerned voices from the defenders of democracy? Did any Member State in this Chamber say something, or raise his voice about the issue of elections? I am sure that many countries would enjoy the chance to cancel or postpone elections when the polling does not look good. Let me also remind everyone of an important truth: in real democracy one election does not earn one the right to rule forever.

Myth number four — Israel has been accused of creating a humanitarian crisis in Gaza by restricting the free movement of goods. In fact, every month, trucks carrying hundreds and thousands of tons of goods — including food, medical equipment and construction materials — pass from Israel into the Gaza strip.

In his past reports, the Special Representative has criticized Israel for restricting the entry of construction materials. How many here have asked us to allow cement into Gaza so that the Palestinians could build houses? Yet when we do, in exchange for our goods and goodwill, Israel is repaid with tunnels of terror.

Just a week ago, the Israel Defense Forces discovered a two-kilometre tunnel originating in Gaza and ending just outside an Israeli community not far from homes, kindergartens and playgrounds. The tunnel was built by Hamas using 500 tons of cement that had been earmarked for construction. I will repeat that again: 500 tons of cement. To understand how much that is, the Statue of Liberty weighs 225 tons. Just imagine how many schools, hospitals and homes could have been built.

In taking responsibility for building the tunnel, a Hamas spokesman said,

“This tunnel was made by the hand of the fighters of Al-Qassam. They will not sleep in their efforts to hit the occupation and kidnap soldiers.”

Instead of building houses, Hamas is building smuggling tunnels; instead of building schools, they are building terror networks. That is the reality that Israel has to live with every day. Instead of using construction materials to build a better future for the Palestinians and the Palestinian people, the leadership in Gaza is committed to destroying the State of Israel. It may just be my hearing, but I have yet to hear the countries that demand Israel allow more cement into Gaza condemn those crimes.

Myth number five — some countries around this table believe that international forces should be on the border to guarantee a future peace agreement. That is interesting, because history has shown that Israel cannot rely on others to ensure its security. While we support the work of United Nations forces on our borders, history has shown that Israel cannot rely on the international community to ensure its own security. That was the case with the first United Nations Emergency Force in the Sinai desert, and with European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah.

The recent involvement of certain United Nations bodies has hardly been helpful. In his remarks earlier, the representative of the Secretariat spoke about an incident last month in Kfar Makhoul. The report neglects to note that, following a review by Israel's Supreme Court, the buildings in question were determined to have been illegally constructed. In the light of that important fact, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) needs reminding that its role is the coordination of humanitarian aid, not aiding in the obstruction of justice. In that regard, OCHA systematically abuses Israel's authority on the ground. It seems that the only thing the Office for Coordination is not doing is coordinating with Israel.

It is time to stop pointing fingers and laying the blame at Israel's doorstep. Israel remains committed to two States for two peoples. We are ready to make an historic compromise to realize the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian State living side-by-side with the Jewish State of Israel. Israelis and Palestinians will have to work together to create new and lasting solutions to old problems. That will only be possible if our work is built on a foundation of truth, mutual recognition and security.

A great convulsion is shaking the Middle East, from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Gibraltar. The tremors have shattered States and toppled Governments, and the ground is still shifting. The

region stands at a crossroads, and it is not yet clear if freedom and moderation will triumph over tyranny and fundamentalism.

Let this be the moment in history when all peoples seek understanding instead of making accusations, when nations strive for harmony instead of dissonance, and when our family of nations shows the conviction, conscience and courage to make peace possible.

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

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

Today I will focus on three topics, namely, Syria, Lebanon and Middle East peace.

On 27 September, the Security Council confirmed that the use of chemical weapons anywhere was a threat to international peace and security (see S/PV.7038). In so doing, the Council fulfilled its role as a guardian of global stability by voting unanimously to require the expeditious and total destruction of Syria's deadly chemical weapons programme. That welcome vote was a necessary response to the Syrian Government's ruthless and repeated use of chemical weapons against its own people. But to have meaning, resolution 2118 (2013) must be implemented immediately and with great rigour. Under the joint leadership of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), implementation has already begun. I commend the brave men and women of both organizations for their courage and professional dedication, and welcome the appointment of Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag.

Make no mistake, what we are attempting is without precedent. Never before have international experts been asked to locate, secure and destroy a vast quantity of nerve agents, toxins and other chemical arms in a country torn apart by conflict. The responsibility for complying with resolution 2118 (2013) rests with Syria's leadership, which built those weapons of mass destruction, then lied about them, proceeded to use them and promised, under international pressure, to cooperate in eliminating them.

The Secretary-General has aptly pointed out that a red light for one form of weapon does not mean a green light for others. The vast majority of the human carnage in Syria has been, and continues to be,

inflicted by Government bombs, mortars, shells and bullets. As innocent people continue to be targeted, the country is disintegrating. That has devastating human consequences, and its repercussions are spreading across the region.

My Government believes that the only viable way to end the horrific violence in Syria is through a political transition, based on the Action Group for Syria Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), which calls for a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and chosen by mutual consent. As President Obama and Secretary Kerry have consistently stated, given the role of the present regime in the monstrous crimes of the past two and a half years, Al-Assad has no part to play in a political transition. The United States supports the consultative efforts now being made by Joint Special Representative Brahimi and will continue consultations of its own with, among others, Mr. Brahimi, Russia, the London 11 and the Syrian opposition, so that the "Geneva II" conference can be convened urgently.

It is imperative to make diplomatic progress, and it is beyond urgent to take additional steps to relieve suffering both inside Syria and among the more than 2 million Syrians refugees who sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The United States strongly endorses the Council's recent presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15) demanding secure passage for humanitarian relief. But statements alone are meaningless without changes in behaviour on the ground. We on the Council must track progress, report any and all obstruction and press urgently for compliance with the basic standards enshrined in the presidential statement. Winter is fast approaching, and the despair of families across Syria is only growing worse.

If I may, I would like take this occasion to highlight two alarming and time-sensitive issues that warrant the Council's urgent attention.

First, in Moadamiya people have been under siege and without access to basic necessities for almost one full year. We have credible reports that residents are eating leaves of trees and that people have died of malnutrition-related causes. The regime continues to trap an estimated 12,000 people, of whom 7,000 are women and children. They are begging us — this week, in fact, begging us — to save them from death. All parties must allow humanitarian agencies unhindered access to evacuate the remaining civilians and deliver lifesaving treatment supplies in that area. The parties

have to respect their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian laws to protect civilians and to allow the safe access of neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations to all people in need. Again, the situation is urgent.

The second issue is the daily assault on medical neutrality. This conflict is going to be remembered even 100 years from now for the obliteration of the core principle of medical neutrality. According to the recent report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic,

“[t]he denial of medical care as a weapon of war is a distinct and chilling reality of the war” (*A/HRC/24/CRP.2, para. 3*); “Government forces have engaged in agonizing cruelty against the sick and wounded.” (*ibid., para. 33*)

The attacks against medical facilities and on those requiring treatment is barbaric and must halt immediately. The provision of emergency help and necessary medical equipment should not be subject to any sort of political litmus test. People in dire need should be helped regardless of their sect or where they come from in Syria.

The Syrian health-care system is shattered. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, as of June, in Al-Raqqa, Dayr Al-Zour and Homs more than 70 per cent of health centres had been damaged or are out of service. Nearly 40 per cent of the 1,724 primary health-care centres across the country are either badly damaged or completely closed. Worse, nearly 70 per cent of Syria’s health professionals, up to 80,000, have fled the country, according to WHO. Some members have seen the statistics that of the 5,000 doctors in Aleppo before the war, 36 remain. Many governorates now lack qualified medical expertise for trauma, anaesthesia and specialized laboratory personnel. In two northern governorates, there is hardly any female staff to cope with reproductive health emergencies or to respond to gender-based violence. The regime must immediately lift any bureaucratic locks on the delivery of urgently needed medical aid and seize targeting medical workers. Non-State actors too must respect medical neutrality and facilitate access.

In conclusion, we appeal urgently to Council members that have influence on the regime to put pressure on the regime to fulfil its obligation under international humanitarian law as it relates to medical neutrality. The United States will continue to urge

opposition groups to facilitate medical access in areas under their control. For the sake of the Syrian people and the sake of the sanctity of medical neutrality everywhere, we have to do more to address that problem.

Lebanon is among the neighbouring countries most affected by the Syrian civil war. Because of the nature of that conflict and because of the influx of refugees, Lebanon faces enormous humanitarian, economic and security challenges. More than one fifth of the population of Lebanon are now refugees from Syria. A recent meeting in New York of the International Support Group for Lebanon demonstrated that the permanent members of the Council, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the United Nations and other international institutions shared a common agenda in support of Lebanon as it faces current challenges and promoted a policy of dissociation from the Syrian conflict. At that meeting, Secretary Kerry announced that the United States would contribute an additional \$30 million to help Lebanese communities cope with the rising demand for public services, including those related to infrastructure, education and health. That is in addition to the \$74 million in new humanitarian assistance, which is Lebanon’s share of the \$340 million in refugee-related aid announced by President Obama during his visit to the General Assembly.

My Government commends Lebanon’s cooperation with the World Bank and the United Nations in developing a plan to address its heightened needs. We look forward to reviewing that plan and we hope it will provide a firm basis, along with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006), for further internationally supported efforts to maintain Lebanon’s political progress, security, social cohesion and economic well-being. In the meantime, we call on the international community to help reduce the extraordinary burdens that Lebanon, through no fault of its own, has been compelled to bear.

Turning finally to the ongoing negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas made clear in front of the General Assembly their commitment to reaching an enduring peace agreement that ended their conflict. President Obama, Secretary Kerry and Special Envoy Martin Indyk remain deeply engaged in achieving a final status accord within the nine-month time frame set for the negotiations.

In addition, the international community continues to demonstrate strong support for the peace process,

most recently through several special events on the margins of the General Assembly, including the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and the Quartet principals meeting, as well as the special meeting of supporters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which conveyed continued support for the Agency and its mission.

As a compliment to the political track, international support for the Palestinian economy and the Palestinian Authority is crucial. We also recognize the need to address the humanitarian needs of the civilian population in Gaza, and wish to highlight the continued efforts we are making to promote economic development in both the West Bank and Gaza, including more than \$348 million in debt relief for the Palestinian Authority that the United States has provided just this year. Private sector debt relief and direct budget support to the Palestinian Authority are vital, and we encourage donors to meet their existing commitments in providing additional support. To stimulate short-term economic growth, we work with the Palestinian Authority to encourage immediate investment in high-impact micro-infrastructure projects in the West Bank. The United States has also provided \$25 million in funding for those projects.

The United States condemns in the strongest terms any calls for violence. We are especially concerned about the recent discovery of attack tunnels emanating from Gaza into Israel. In addition, we remain concerned about ongoing incidents of violence in the West Bank, as well as recent clashes around holy sites in Jerusalem. We stress the importance of maintaining calm in those sensitive places. We urge restraint on the part of all sides and call upon all parties to avoid taking actions that undermine final status negotiations. Following the bold lead of both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, it is essential that we all work to build the trust and confidence necessary for lasting peace.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we would like to confirm our support for the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Palestine on 29 July. We trust that they will be substantive and continuous and outline a clear path towards a two-State solution, a cessation of the conflict and the establishment of lasting peace based on international legal documents known to all of us, including Security Council resolutions.

We take note of how difficult it is to reach consensus on the two-State solution. The parties are seeking fully

to solve all final status issues, where in many cases it will not be as easy to find a compromise solution. Whatever the situation, reaching final agreements is undoubtedly the responsibility of the direct participants in the negotiations, who must demonstrate full responsibility for the future of their peoples. Of course, any eventual agreement must be developed by the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves, and not imposed externally. Otherwise, it would not be viable and would not last.

We deem it very positive that a meeting of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators was held here at the ministerial level last month — the first such meeting in a year and a half. The Quartet is still the internationally recognized Security Council-authorized mechanism to facilitate the Middle East settlement.

We are convinced that fostering cooperation with the League of Arab States, which is making a significant contribution to the negotiation process, will help step up efforts to find a fair resolution to chronic problems. We support the efforts of the League to promote the Arab Peace Initiative. Its role is very important, among other things for restoring the intra-Palestinian unity on the platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Clearly, implementing any eventual agreement, which the parties intend to achieve no later than April 2014, would not be possible if there were to be a split.

The Quartet's adoption of a statement on the resumed negotiation process (see SG/2202) is of particular importance. However, we cannot dwell on that. We need to move further by encouraging parties and sending clear signals to show that the international community does not wish to see the Palestinian issue being pushed into the background, given all of the upheavals in the Arab world over recent years. Achieving a comprehensive, fair and lasting Arab-Israeli settlement would be a key contribution to normalizing the situation in the region.

It is a source of serious concern that illegal Israeli settlement activities continue in the occupied territories. Unilateral and provocative acts are unacceptable. Measures by both sides to improve the atmosphere surrounding the renewed negotiations should be a *sine qua non*. The measures should be sustainable, gradual and regular in nature.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is consistently deteriorating, despite the basic climate of calm and certain concessions introduced by Israel

on the importation of fuel and building materials. It is clear that giving the citizens of Gaza a normal life is only possible by fully lifting the blockade of the Strip and restoring the unity of the Palestinian territories.

Russia is fully assisting the current negotiation efforts, both as part of the Quartet and through ongoing dialogue that we have been carrying out with the Palestinians, Israelis and Governments of the region. Apart from the meetings that took place on the sidelines of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for reaching a settlement in the Middle East recently visited the region. We will continue to assist Palestine with our traditional assistance as well as by strengthening the institutional basis for statehood and the economy.

Resolution 2118 (2013) opened a window of opportunity for convening an international conference on Syria. We must not drag our feet. The Syrian conflict is increasingly taking on an obvious and very dangerous interfaith aspect. Christians find themselves under the threat of being chased off their lands and are experiencing terrible suffering at the hands of the Islamists. We are hearing of new cases of the desecration and destruction of religious facilities and murders and violence. Bandits, cloaked in Islam, are instilling religious hatred in people and casting a shadow over the community on behalf of whom they act. We need to really urge all the Syrian parties to meet in Geneva and make their choice, using political methods to resolve the various problems.

The Syrian Government has frequently said that it was ready to participate in the Geneva meeting. We welcome the fully fledged accession by Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The authorities of the country are demonstrating openness and preparedness to work closely with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations and to ensure the international inspectors access to their declared facilities. The destruction of equipment linked with the chemical weapon programme is fully underway. In that regard, there is a need for the armed opposition also to comply unswervingly with the requirements in resolution 2118 (2013) in terms of providing full assistance to the OPCW and United Nations support during the joint mission. It is clear that at least part of the opposition is trying to undermine the efforts to implement the resolution.

In conclusion, I would like once again to underscore that in terms of finding a political and diplomatic settlement and in working on chemical disarmament, there is no option to pooling the collective mutually complementary efforts of the international community. Russia is prepared to work jointly on that.

Mr. Sahebzada Ahmed Khan (Pakistan): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

Today's debate is the first open debate of the Security Council on the Middle East since the resumption of talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians on 14 August. Those talks carry the heavy burden of hope — hope for the region as well as hope for the international community. They represent a remarkable and historic chance of a solution, based on the establishment of two States, living side by side in peace and security.

We have noted that a number of negotiation rounds have taken place in Jericho and Jerusalem. Reports coming out of those talks are less than encouraging, yet we remain cautiously optimistic. It is our hope, as well as our wish, that things behind the scenes are moving in the right direction. The nine-month deadline is critical. The longer it takes, the dimmer the possibility of a negotiated settlement would become. In his report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the Secretary-General says that:

“For the negotiations to have a chance at success, they need to be meaningful with a clear political horizon and yield early dividends” (*S/2013/524, para. 16*).

Pakistan agrees with that assessment.

We also welcome the fact that the Quartet principals met on the sidelines of the General Assembly on 27 September and that they reaffirmed their determination to lend effective support to the parties and recommitted themselves to a permanent status agreement within the agreed timeline of nine months. The commitment of the international community to that shared objective is critical. It is a fragile and complicated process, and all the more, it merits the support and continued encouragement of the international community. As we have consistently said, the credibility of the Council is linked to the peaceful solution of the long-standing Palestinian issue.

For the process to move forward, specific actions are required on the ground. How can we expect the

building of trust in an atmosphere where settlement construction continues? Palestinian prisoners remain in prolonged detention. Gaza remains blocked and attacks in and around the Al-Aqsa compound continue to sour the atmosphere.

That delicate process requires trust, and trust is earned by action and not by mere words. There have to be consequences for actions, and therefore, we welcome, in that regard, the European Union guidelines on settlements. Pakistan's support to the Palestinian cause is unrelenting. We have recently contributed \$1 million to the Palestinian Authority for the construction of the Palestinian Embassy in Islamabad. That is just one of the sincere gestures of the Government of Pakistan to show our solidarity with the people of Palestine and their just cause. We continue to believe that peace in the Middle East is dependent on the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Vacating occupied Lebanese lands and the Syrian Golan is also imperative.

Allow me to turn now to the precarious situation in Syria. Pakistan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) and continued cooperation of the Syrian Government with the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), aimed at dismantling its chemical weapons programme. The Secretary-General says, in his proposal on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria (S/2013/591), that it is uncharted territory. Pakistan hopes that the cooperation of the Syrian Government with the joint team will continue and that the opposition groups would also extend similar support.

It may be recalled that the improved atmosphere in the Council was instrumental in the adoption of the presidential statement on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15). We hope that the Council's pronouncement will have the desired effect in alleviating the sufferings of our Syrian brothers and sisters, both inside the country and outside.

Lastly, neither the destruction of chemical weapons nor the improvement of the humanitarian situation is a panacea for the ills afflicting Syria. The real solution lies in dialogue and engagement. We welcome the renewed momentum towards the convening of Geneva II and hope that it will be convened as soon as November. Work towards a plan that fulfils the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and that is

Syrian-led and Syrian-owned remains crucial. We hope that all sides will work towards such an outcome.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his informative briefing. I would also like to thank the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements. Luxembourg fully endorses the statement that will be made by the observer of the European Union at this debate.

I would like to speak first about the Middle East peace process. The direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians begun on 14 August are continuing on a regular basis, and we welcome that. Nonetheless, we have no illusions. In order to achieve a negotiated two-State solution in the agreed time frame of nine months, numerous obstacles must still be overcome. We hope that with the decisive support of the United States, and in particular the personal involvement of Secretary of State John Kerry, as well as the active involvement of Special Envoy Martin Indyk, Israel and Palestine will continue to negotiate with the requisite earnest and discretion. We hope that both parties will demonstrate good faith and be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to build an enduring peace in the Middle East.

The time has come to take the necessary historical decisions, to implement a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and to make peace through a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. To that end, unilateral acts that fuel the logic of defiance must cease. No one in Palestine will believe in the successful outcome of the peace process if illegal settlement activities continue at their current pace, if tensions and provocative acts on the esplanades of mosques intensify, and if the separation wall continues to deprive Palestinians of their land. For their part, the Palestinians must end the violence in the West Bank and stop firing rockets from the Gaza Strip. They must fulfil their commitments and continue their efforts to combat terrorism.

Luxembourg will continue to work with its European Union partners to contribute to the efforts under way in close cooperation with the key stakeholders, including the countries of the region and the Quartet. We welcome

the Quartet's meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly and its statement issued on 27 September.

I turn now to Syria.

Since the open debate that was held in July, the Security Council has been able to take two important decisions with respect to disarmament and humanitarian access. On 27 September, we adopted resolution 2118 (2013) which follows up on the terrible chemical weapons attack of 21 August and seeks the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons. The destruction in the established time frame of one of the largest chemical weapons arsenal in the world is an enormous job.

No effort must be spared in order to support the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations in its work. Syria, for its part, must unswervingly respect all the requirements and commitments stipulated by the Council. On 27 September, Luxembourg made available to the OPCW a satellite communication facility, and last week we decided to contribute €500,000 to the special trust fund established by the United Nations and the OPCW to cover part of the cost of the Joint Mission.

Of course, the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme will not in and of itself end the immense suffering of the Syrian people, which has now lasted for more than two and a half years. The violence, unfortunately, has seen no end. Children living in besieged communities are now dying of famine. In January, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that there were roughly 60,000 dead. Today, just nine months later, the number of victims has doubled. The list of war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes that appal the conscience of humankind is only increasing. Given the level of horror, the situation in Syria must be referred to the International Criminal Court. The Council must shoulder its responsibilities in that regard.

The humanitarian and security challenges can be resolved only through a politically negotiated solution to the crisis. Now that a provisional date for the "Geneva II" conference has been announced, we would encourage all parties concerned to participate in order to finally set in motion a dynamic that will lead to an end to the hostilities and move towards the necessary political transition in Syria based on the 30 June 2012 communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

In the meantime, it is urgent for the parties in Syria, in particular the Syrian authorities, to follow up

the provisions of our second important decision, the presidential statement on the humanitarian situation adopted by the Council on 2 October (S/PRST/2013/15). The parties must facilitate without delay free and unhindered humanitarian access to the affected populations. The evacuation of civilians trapped in Moadamiya, on the outskirts of Damascus, and of thousands of families who are prisoners in other besieged towns, is urgently needed. There is an urgent need to lift bureaucratic obstacles, ensure the provision of medical supplies, provide humanitarian pauses, open humanitarian corridors and provide cross-border access and passage across the front lines to affected populations.

We count on the Secretary-General and his team to continue their regular updates to the Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria and its impact on neighbouring countries, as well as to inform us of the implementation of the provisions of the 2 October presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15). The decisions we take will be of no value unless we remain focused on their implementation on the ground and if we collectively and firmly assure that they are applied.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing. I also listened attentively to the statements made by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

The Palestinian issue lies at the core of the Middle East question. The only way out lies in resolving the dispute through dialogue and negotiation. China has always maintained that on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map for peace, as well as through peace talks between Palestine and Israel, an independent State of Palestine must be established with complete sovereignty based on the pre-1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital, whereby the two States, Palestine and Israel, can live side by side in peace and security.

At present, the resumption of direct talks between Palestine and Israel represents a rare opportunity for the Middle East peace process. It is our hope that Palestine and Israel will seize that opportunity, seek common ground, avoid any action or polemics that might undermine the prospect of peace talks, and try to achieve substantive progress as soon as possible. The immediate priority is to take effective measures to halt all settlement activities and to stop acts of violence

targeting innocent civilians in an effort to preserve the climate for peace talks. The international community needs to scale up its support for Palestine in order to facilitate its economic development and to enhance the confidence of the Palestinian people in the peace process.

At present, the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Gaza, remains grave. The relevant United Nations resolutions need to be effectively implemented, and it is our hope that Israel will fully lift the Gaza blockade so as to alleviate the humanitarian difficulties in Gaza.

We welcomed the ministerial meeting of the Quartet in September on the margins of the General Assembly. China supports the Security Council's strengthened role in facilitating the international community's unanimous support of the peace process in the Middle East.

China firmly supports the Palestinian people in their just cause to restore their legitimate sovereignty and has continued its unique, active support of the peace process. China stands ready to continue to work with the international community in contributing positively towards a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian issue and the achievement of lasting peace in the Middle East.

A political solution is the only way out of the Syrian conflict and such a solution must be promoted in parallel with the elimination of chemical weapons. At present, inspection and elimination of Syria's chemical arsenal is progressing positively and appropriately. China welcomes the Secretary-General's appointment of Ms. Sigrid Kaag as Special Coordinator of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations and notes that Ms. Kaag is already working in Syria. It is China's hope that the Joint Mission will strengthen communications with the interested parties, including the Syrian Government, to ensure continued progress in the inspection and elimination of chemical weapons according to schedule. China considers highly important the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria and is ready to take part in relevant efforts by providing expertise and financial assistance.

The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013) explicitly calling for implementation of the Geneva Communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) and the convening of the

proposed "Geneva II" conference aimed at providing an opportunity for a political solution of the Syrian conflict. The international community must seize the opportunity with a view to forging a consensus in order to vigorously advance the political process and facilitate an early convening of Geneva II aimed at a positive outcome. China calls on the Syrian parties to achieve, for the greater good of their country and people, a ceasefire and an end to the violence, without delay, as well as an end to the crisis through dialogue and the rebuilding of their homeland as soon as possible.

China supports the good offices of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Joint Special Representative Brahimi and stands ready to participate in Geneva II and work with the parties to seek a comprehensive, just and appropriate solution to the question of Syria.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements. My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

With respect to the main issue of the peace process in the Middle East, negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians have resumed after three years. The viability of a two-State solution, which is the only lasting and durable solution to the conflict, is at stake.

In that context, we welcome the initiative and commitment of United States Secretary of State John Kerry. At the ministerial meeting of the Quartet on 27 September, representatives agreed to support the designated goal of the negotiations, namely, to conclude an agreement on all final status issues and to establish a methodology based on regular meetings scheduled over a nine-month period. Twenty years after Oslo, a new interim agreement would serve no purpose, nor would continued negotiations with no end in sight.

We also welcome the sense of responsibility manifested by the leaders of the two sides, Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas, in deciding to return to the negotiating table and urge them to maintain that same approach in conducting the negotiations. In order to overcome scepticism and the temptation to withdraw, both parties should adopt confidence measures aimed at changing the situation on the ground and outlining a path to a just and durable peace. They must refrain from any decision that could hinder the progress of negotiations.

In that context, our position has been constant. First, the continuing settlement activity contravenes international law and calls into question the viability of the two-State solution; in that connection, the European Union has drawn the appropriate consequences. Secondly, violence, in all its aspects, must cease. Israel's security and similarly, respect for the human rights of the Palestinians, cannot be compromised. In that context, France regrets the loss of life on both sides resulting from the too frequent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Thirdly, the situation of Palestinian prisoners and the issue of administrative detention — despite recent progress on the latter — remains of concern. We call for the release of the second group of Palestinian prisoners, which is a cornerstone for the resumption of the peace talks and has been again postponed to 29 October. Fourthly, it is equally important to ensure sustainable economic development in Palestine in order to strengthen, on the Palestinian side, the peace camp of President Abbas.

The Gaza blockade — which benefits Hamas — does not help the situation, nor do the financial difficulties of the Palestinian Authority and the economic slowdown evident in the Palestinian territories. We must help President Abbas with those issues. The measures taken by Israel in recent months to ease restrictions — especially those concerning work permits and water access — are steps in the right direction. They should be continued and strengthened, including in Area C and in Gaza.

In terms of Syria, beyond the process of dismantling its chemical weapons, the Council must stand ready to respond to the ongoing tragedy. Faced with evidence of the horrifying massacre of 21 August, which resulted from the use of chemical weapons, the Security Council demanded an end to Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. As France had requested, the decision allows for monitoring by the Council and measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in the case of non-compliance by the Damascus regime in assuming its international obligations.

The Council must ensure the strict implementation of the decision. I commend the cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which have been given the responsibility for dealing with the weapons, and their courageous staff, who are already deployed in Syria. I also express my delegation's support and confidence to Ms. Sigrid Kaag, who was appointed by the Secretary-

General as Special Coordinator of the Joint Mission of the OPCW and the United Nations. Nevertheless, such progress must continue. A crucial issue is the fact that every day, innocent civilians are being killed in attacks carried out by the Syrian regime.

For its part, France calls for a political solution. In that context, it supports the convening of a conference in Geneva, "Geneva II", leading to a political solution in Syria based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) of 30 June 2012. States participating in Geneva II must fully embrace that goal. It is important that the process be credible and lead quickly to the establishment of a transitional Government with full executive powers, including presidential powers in the security, intelligence and armed forces sectors.

The Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, are committed to organizing the Geneva II conference. France is fully cooperating in those efforts, together with its partners. The successful ministerial meeting convened by France on the margins of the General Assembly with Mr. Al-Jerba showed the international community's support of the Syrian national coalition that represents the moderate opposition to the regime of Bashar Al-Assad and should guide the opposition's delegation in Geneva.

Pending the Geneva II conference, the Security Council must ensure that the presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15) of 2 October, on humanitarian access in Syria, enables real change on the ground. It is clear that, three weeks after its adoption, there is no improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria. The regime continues to refuse to grant United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors free, immediate and unimpeded access to populations in need. France supports the initiative to invite the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Amos, to present to the Council a first evaluation of the implementation of the presidential statement.

Lastly, I would like to say a word on Lebanon, which is suffering the consequences of the conflict in Syria. Lebanon is dealing with the challenges and threats it faces because of the war in Syria. Refugees from Syria are arriving in increasing numbers and today represent approximately 30 per cent of the Lebanese population. The deterioration of the security situation due to the fallout from the Syrian crisis and the resultant worsening

of community tensions, including the two attacks of 15 and 23 August in Ruways and Tripoli respectively, are tragic illustrations of this. There is a political and institutional crisis, with institutions paralysed, waiting for a new Government to be formed. There is also an economic crisis, which weighs heavily on the country's internal balance. Given these threats, the dissociation policy adopted by President Sleiman must at all costs be maintained and respected by all the Lebanese actors who collectively adhered to it by signing the Baabda Declaration on 11 June 2012.

Lebanon must be supported. We welcome the launching, on the margins of the General Assembly, of the International Support Group for Lebanon, which enabled an unanimous expression of support for the stability and independence of Lebanon and respect for its sovereignty. We believe that it is now crucial that we pursue this mobilization with the United Nations. The Group's work is ongoing, in particular in Beirut, with a view to demonstrating our solidarity with that friendly country and to helping it face this sweeping crisis, which is not only humanitarian in nature but also affects the political and security environment.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Its work has been affected by the difficult situation facing the country, but its role is crucial in supporting Lebanon in its efforts to fight against impunity.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and your delegation for convening this open debate. I would like to express my appreciation for the briefing we just received from Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman on the current situation in the Middle East.

As regards the Middle East peace process, Rwanda firmly believes that now is the time to take bold and concrete steps towards sustainable peace. The ongoing direct negotiations must achieve a lasting solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and hence give way to the vision of a two-State solution, where a secure State of Israel lives side by side with a viable State of Palestine. We applaud the renewed commitment by both Israelis and the Palestinian leadership to advance these talks, and Rwanda pledges its continued support to both parties. We are encouraged by the holding of the Quartet meeting of 27 September in New York, attended by both Israelis and Palestinian chief negotiators, and we hope that both parties will keep the current momentum aimed at achieving a comprehensive

agreement. Furthermore, we emphasize the need for all concerned parties to strongly support the peace process and avoid engaging in subversive activities that would undermine the progress achieved.

On the issue of Syria, Rwanda remains concerned with the current situation in the country, where a human tragedy is unfolding with spillover effects on the entire region. We reiterate our indisputable condemnation of all forms of violence by whomever commits it.

Rwanda welcomes the progress made following the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination and destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. We are encouraged by the close cooperation between the Syrian Government and the joint mission by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to eliminate and destroy the chemical weapons in Syria. On this note, we urge the Syrian rebels to permit the joint mission access to chemical weapon sites in areas under their control, and we call for all parties to sign a ceasefire agreement in order to ease the process of dismantling Syria's deadly weapons.

We take this opportunity to reiterate our call to all stakeholders to stop the supply of weapons to either side of the conflict, and we urge all parties to desist from violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, bearing in mind that the perpetrators will be held accountable before a court of law. Rwanda further calls upon all parties to facilitate safe, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need.

As we have said before, it is evident that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Rwanda remains committed to the initiative to convene the "Geneva II" conference next month in order to promote an inclusive, Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We welcome the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Brahimi, who is on a Middle East tour to garner support for a Geneva II conference. Rwanda calls upon all parties concerned to set a date for the conference to avoid further speculation.

Allow me to comment briefly on Lebanon. The situation in that country is particularly worrisome, as violence is becoming more and more sectarian, creating further political and security challenges. The international community must condemn these acts and

effectively support President Michel Sleiman and the Lebanese Government for their commitment to the Baabda Declaration and their dissociation policy. Peace and stability in Lebanon is paramount and should be firmly maintained with the support of the international community. We call on all parties in Syria to fully respect the sovereignty, political independence and territorial unity of Lebanon, and we also call on all Lebanese actors to avoid further escalation and to embrace the path of political understanding.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing this morning.

The United Kingdom warmly welcomes the return to direct negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders since our most recent open debate here in July (S/PV.7007). We extend our appreciation to the United States, particularly to Secretary Kerry and Special Envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations Martin Indyk for their steadfast commitment. That determination has enabled the parties to return to the table. We welcome the parties' commitment to intensify negotiations in the coming weeks, and we applaud the bold leadership demonstrated on both sides.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Palestinian Economic Initiative. We are taking a leading role in fostering private-sector-led sustainable economic growth in support of Palestinian State-building efforts. We look to Israel to take the necessary steps to further ease restrictions on both the West Bank and Gaza, to enable the step change in the Palestinian economy that Secretary Kerry is rightly advocating.

It is important to build confidence among the Palestinian and Israeli peoples that their common goal of peace is within reach. Over the past few weeks, there have been a number of concerning events, such as the murder of three Israelis, including two serving Israeli Defense Forces soldiers in the West Bank, and we condemn that unreservedly. There has been a rise in price tag attacks across East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including acts of setting fire and vandalizing Palestinian property. Those responsible for these crimes must be brought to justice. We are also troubled by the rising tensions around the holy sites of Jerusalem, sites that hold religious significance and are politically sensitive. We call on all parties to maintain the status quo and engage in dialogue to ensure calm.

Going forward, the international community must do all it can to support both parties in working towards

our common goal of reaching a negotiated two-State solution that ends the conflict once and for all.

Concerning Syria, for the first time, with the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the Security Council imposes binding and enforceable obligations on the Syrian regime, with the threat of action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in the event of non-compliance. Resolution 2118 (2013), the first on Syria in 17 months, requires the full implementation of the Executive Council decision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, whereby Syria's chemical weapons must be verifiably eliminated within the first half of next year. The voluntary destruction of those chemical weapons, which until recently the Al-Assad regime denied that it possessed, is a huge step forward on the issue. Resolution 2118 (2013) also formally endorses the Geneva communiqué of last year (S/2012/523, annex), calling for a transitional governing body with full executive powers.

Today, my Foreign Minister hosted a meeting in London of 11 Foreign Ministers and a senior delegation from the Syrian National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, led by President Al-Jarba. The communiqué issued after that meeting welcomed progress on preparations for a "Geneva II" conference, which could take place in November. Participants underscored that Geneva II should lead to a transitional governing body with full executive powers, agreed on by mutual consent. They agreed that once such a body is established, Al-Assad and his close associates with blood on their hands will have no future role to play in Syria. The United Kingdom will continue to work closely with the Syrian National Coalition, which is committed to the Geneva communiqué and an inclusive and democratic Syria, and which rejects extremism.

Well over 100,000 people have been killed, and hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians continue to suffer from the regime's brutal use of conventional weapons and gross human rights violations committed on a daily basis. The United Kingdom calls on all Member States to support the Third Committee resolution on the human rights situation in Syria. We must send a clear message to the Al-Assad regime that the international community is united in its condemnation of such human rights violations.

We have seen the Security Council come together on humanitarian access with the adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15). That should

now be translated into visible change on the ground. The humanitarian situation remains dire. More than 6.8 million people are displaced, and every 15 seconds a Syrian becomes a refugee. That is almost 5,000 people every day. The United Nations estimates that up to 2.5 million people in areas under siege cannot be reached by humanitarian agencies. The use of siege by regime forces in Moadamiya, Homs, Aleppo and Al-Hasakah is unacceptable, and I echo Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos's call for an immediate pause in hostilities in Moadamiya to allow humanitarian agencies unhindered access in order to evacuate the remaining civilians and deliver life-saving treatment and supplies.

The United Kingdom recognizes the scale and despair of the humanitarian crisis. During the general debate of the General Assembly, we announced a further \$160 million in humanitarian assistance, which now brings the United Kingdom's total Syria-related humanitarian funding to \$800 million. That is the largest sum that we have ever committed to a single humanitarian crisis. The international community as a whole pledged more than \$1 billion in new funding during September. That is a welcome step, but more must be done.

Finally, concerning Lebanon, as July's Security Council presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/9) and the recent meetings of the International Support Group have demonstrated, there is genuine international unity in support of Lebanon's stability. The United Kingdom has tripled its own humanitarian and security assistance to Lebanon this year, and we call on the Lebanese parties to take urgent steps to form a new consensus Government to tackle the significant challenges they face.

We are at a critical juncture in both the Middle East peace process and the Syria conflict. Both crises require bold, responsible leadership on the part of the parties to conflict and active engagement on the part of the international community in order to secure an end to conflict and a better future for the people of the region.

Mr. Menan (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing and the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of the State of Israel for their statements.

We are holding this open debate at a time when the situation in the Middle East continues to be of serious concern to the international community. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while we welcomed the resumption of direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians with the aim of arriving at a definitive settlement of the conflict, today we remain somewhat disappointed with the slowness of the negotiations. What is worse, the violence continues on both sides, rendering the achievement of any progress in the negotiations hypothetical.

That is why Togo urges the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to maintain the course of the direct negotiations and to stop resorting to acts that damage any possibility of settling the conflict. It is why we urge the Israeli authorities to continue to act in ways that promote confidence, such as releasing 26 Palestinian common-law criminals from prison on 13 August, issuing new permits enabling Palestinian to travel in Israel and authorizing the importation of construction materials into Gaza, as well as easing measures announced on 25 September by the Minister of Strategic Affairs, regarding the lifting of some restrictions in the occupied Palestinian territories. We also hope that construction of new colonies will end and the embargo on the Gaza Strip will be lifted.

By the same token, we ask Hamas, which continues to administer the Gaza Strip, to cease all acts of provocation and to control the armed groups that shoot rockets into southern Israel. Hamas's engagement alongside the Palestinian Authority in the peace process would be an added guarantee of success in the talks on a general settlement of the Palestinian question.

Given that the international community bases its hopes on pursuing direct negotiations between the two parties with the goal of achieving two viable States living in peace and security and within internationally recognized borders, Togo urges the friends of Israel and Palestine, as well as all the sponsors of the peace process, to spare no effort in supporting the current negotiations so as to arrive at a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. In that regard, we hope that the return of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to the region, said to be in the next few days, will help the two parties to make meaningful progress, despite the obstacles that litter the road to peace.

Concerning Syria, we would like once more to commend the newfound unity of the Security Council,

which succeeded in creating a mechanism that has enabled a successful start to the process of dismantling Syria's chemical arsenal. Verifying the initial information received from the Syrian Government, and bringing Syria's chemical weapons under international control and destroying them, are major achievements, and we welcome them. In that regard, Togo commends the commitment and efforts of the Secretary-General and the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for establishing a Joint Mission tasked with definitively relieving Syria of its chemical weapons, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013). Togo is also pleased that on 11 October the Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW in recognition of its commitment to eliminating chemical weapons in Syria and everywhere else in the world.

The destruction of Syria's chemical weapons should not, however, overshadow the ravages that the war continues to inflict on the country through massacres, arbitrary arrests and detentions and horrendous human rights violations such as rape and sexual violence, as well as the recruitment of children.

Togo again condemns all those acts and the bombings in recent days, as well as the kidnappings of humanitarian workers. It remains very concerned about the religious nature of the conflict, which unfortunately destroys social cohesion and renders the future of religious minorities in Syria uncertain.

My country believes it is important that the international community work further to put an end to that war. The Security Council should — after unanimously acknowledging in its resolution 2118 (2013) that the only solution to the current crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex) — encourage the adoption of appropriate measures to facilitate the effective organization of the conference, announced for November.

In that regard, we urge the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to continue their efforts to achieve that goal. We also believe it is urgent that countries that have any influence with the opposition coalition to use all that influence to convince it of the need for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, which requires a dialogue between the opposition and the power in Damascus.

While calling on all parties to move towards negotiations for the settlement of the crisis, we would also urge the friends of both parties to put pressure on them to sign a ceasefire that would allow humanitarian agencies to help people in difficulty throughout the territory. It is essential that the provisions of the presidential statement of 2 October (S/PRST/2013/15) be implemented, in particular with regard to the call for countries and donor agencies to increase their contributions to Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons.

With regard to Lebanon, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in that country because of the flows of Syrian and Palestinian refugees it continues to receive. The number of refugees, which is estimated at over 1.3 million people and is growing by the day, affects the country's political, social and economic life, as well as its security. Living with refugees is becoming increasingly difficult because the country has exceeded its ability to receive any more people, as President Michel Sleiman recently announced from rostrum of the General Assembly when he was calling for international assistance (see A/68/PV.6). While reiterating his appeal, Togo believes that the solution to that issue lies fundamentally in a political solution to the conflict in Syria. And it is towards that end that the international community, the Security Council and all States in the region should work.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing. I also extend my appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

At the end of July, some days after our last open debate on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.7007), Palestinians and Israelis returned to the negotiating table, giving new life to the peace process and overcoming the inertia of a dangerous stalemate that had been ongoing for almost three years. That was an auspicious moment in a regional context, which, as we have all noted, is marked by uncertainty and upheaval.

However, three of the nine months that the parties established as the time period for reaching an agreement have gone by, and despite the fact that the negotiations have been carried out with a great deal of reservations, the information that we have indicates that the progress so far has been complex, which is understandable, but also extremely slow. That is partly because, instead

of beginning with the broad and widely accepted principles, there is questioning of the parameters of the two-State solution, which are contained in international law and supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. Among those parameters is that the pre-June 1967 borders should be the basis of any negotiation.

In various newspapers around the world, we are already seeing that lack of respect for the principles upheld by the international community. Some articles that I have been reading in the past few days have said that the question is not whether there will be conflict in the future between Israel and Palestine. There will be, and that cannot be prevented. Preventing catastrophic changes involves putting an end to the oppressive reign of an obsolete idea and allowing for both sides to see the world as it is and adapt to it.

Those remarks, which have been underscored in different ways, have been published in important newspapers around the world, including in Latin America. They undoubtedly strengthen the idea that Argentina has been putting forth and which we stress again. We believe that the Security Council should express itself on the entirety of the situations that we have been describing as situations that either positively or negatively affect the Palestinian-Israeli situation and take concrete steps to complement the negotiations and support the two-State solution. I think that it is important for the Council to express itself on behalf of the overwhelming majority opinion favouring a two-State solution. In doing so, the Council could help to counteract those who I do not want to classify, but perhaps I would call them “free thinkers”, who think that the principles of the Charter of the United Nations or of international law or the 1967 solution are obsolete and that instead we need to be realistic and pragmatic.

Enormous atrocities have been committed in the world with the call for realism and pragmatism. Therefore, once again we urge the Security Council to express itself on the principles that it maintains in order to give a definitive solution, so that there can be real, lasting peace with secure borders for Israel and a consolidated Palestinian State. While there have been brave acts, such as the release of the first group of Palestinian prisoners detained prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords, since the beginning of the negotiations we have seen other developments as well that are completely incompatible with the peace process

and that deepen the mistrust and do not contribute to creating favourable conditions for dialogue.

We repeat, as others have done, that illegal settlements campaign has increased on the West Bank, as have demolitions and displacement in East Jerusalem and in Area C, ongoing confrontations between protesters and the Israel Defense Forces and tragic developments such as the one we saw in August in Kalandia, rocket launches against Israel and unceasing confrontational rhetoric.

At the same time, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, suffocated by a blockade that has been in place for more than six years. We know and agree that the next several months will be decisive in putting an end to an occupation that has lasted for more than half a century and that is a morally reproachable, politically unacceptable and strategically unviable.

I turn to the matter of Syria as a second issue. In a few days, a month will have passed since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), on chemical weapons programme in Syria. We note with satisfaction that, with the collaboration of the Syrian Government, the initial verification activities for the elimination of that programme began almost immediately.

The Secretary-General sent along his recommendations on the role of the United Nations in that process — including those on putting together the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations and appointing a special coordinator to lead those efforts — and they were quickly backed by the Security Council. All of that is a good start for a process that has involved much suffering and difficulty and should conclude at the middle of the year ahead.

However, resolution 2118 (2013) has an additional component that is equally, if not more, important that the elimination of the chemical weapons programme in Syria. Through that resolution, the Security Council echoed the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2013/523, annex) and explicitly called for the “Geneva II” conference to be held as soon as possible in order to implement the communiqué, thus launching a transition led by the Syrians themselves that would put an end to the spilling of blood that has lasted more than two and a half years.

To comply with that request, we need the same political will and the same determination shown by all of the relevant stakeholders when it comes to looking at the matter of chemical weapons. We hope that both the Government and the opposition will soon put together credible delegations that are able to make compromises and implement them so that the conference can start as announced next month.

It is worth reiterating that, in accordance with paragraph 12 of the 30 June 2012 communiqué, the global and regional Powers that met in Geneva last year and are today sitting in today's open debate reaffirmed their opposition "to any additional militarization of the conflict". That part of the communiqué seems to have been forgotten but it must be complied with.

Resolution 2118 (2013) was undoubtedly a meaningful accomplishment. It was a sign of unity in the Security Council which, except for sporadic moments, had been paralysed with regard to the Syrian crisis. In fact, in August we could say that unity in the Council was perhaps accidental. We no doubt made progress with resolution 2118 (2013), but we do not know if the dynamics surrounding the conflict have changed.

We recall that Kofi Annan, when he left his post as Joint Special Envoy for Syria, said something that, as far as we can tell, remains valid to this day. He said:

"Only a united international community can compel both sides to engage in a peaceful political transition. But a political process is difficult, if not impossible, while all sides — within and without Syria — see opportunity to advance their narrow agendas by military means."

If Geneva II is to take place, the regional and international stakeholders that support both sides should be fully convinced that the political solution is the only possible solution.

Lastly, I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to recognize the fact that the Council has been able to adopt a presidential statement on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis (S/2013/PRST/15). For Argentina, it is important though not crucial that the declaration was issued as a presidential statement and not as a resolution. It speaks as the expression of a united Council, not as a menu of options that the parties can choose from. It speaks of obligations and requirements that emanate from international law that must be complied with by all.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate, and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing, in which he gave us a detailed explanation of the recent developments in the Middle East. We are meeting in this Chamber once again to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and the events whose impact is a source of concern for the international community and which requires particular attention.

Two months ago, the world saw an improvement with the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians following an effort by the United States led by Secretary of State John Kerry. That effort enabled the resumption on 14 August of negotiations with a view to reaching a comprehensive agreement in nine months. Whereas that is a promising sign that brought an end to the paralysis that plagued the peace process for some three years, it does indeed represent a real opportunity — and possibly the last — for achieving a two-State solution.

However, some positions seek to undermine confidence in the two parties and prevent from making progress in promoting peace and coexistence. The opportunity to restart the peace process must not be dismissed by any of the parties. They must all commit to a negotiating process with deadlines and a clear plan while refraining from doing anything that could hamper the process or present obstacles to it, in particular, the ongoing settlement activity and attacks on Haram Al-Sharif.

The Palestinian parties have shown their good faith and a great degree of wisdom and sense of responsibility to ensure the success of the negotiations under way. The Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territories have shown patience and restraint, despite the disastrous situation caused by the oppressive embargo. Arab States have also shown their good faith by proposing the Arab Peace Initiative.

Morocco has for decades contributed effectively to promoting negotiations and constructive dialogue between all parties to the conflict in the Middle East in order to achieve a solution that would respect the legitimate rights of Palestinians to establish their independent, viable State in the Palestinian territories with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the return of Palestinian and Lebanese territories. The Kingdom of Morocco has always considered the question to be linked to the issue of Al-Quds, whose symbolic

identity must be preserved. That has been the goal of the Al-Quds Committee, chaired by His Majesty the King, which has sought to preserve the city's religious and civilizational heritage as commons shared by the three monotheistic religions and to promote the city as a symbol of cooperation and assistance.

We are pleased that the Quartet met in New York and welcome its contribution to the ongoing negotiations. We hope that the Council will play a more active role in reaching a comprehensive solution, which is what that the international community has sought to achieve since the Organization was created. The Security Council proved itself able to speak in a unified voice in adopting resolution 2118 (2011) and by the way in which it has dealt with the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian conflict.

We are aware of the difficulties and complications regarding the implementation of that resolution and the convening of a second Geneva conference, which would be a means for attaining a peaceful solution and bringing an end to the violence and further provocations. It should allow for the building of a society based on peace and reconciliation that encompasses all Syrians and thereby alleviate the burden on neighbouring countries which are suffering the repercussions of the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. His presentation was, as ever, extremely useful in its overview of the general situation in the region, the accelerated changes occurring there and the opportunities that they offer.

The situation in the Middle East is characterized by its volatility and the serious challenges that are threatening to destabilize the region. At the same time, over recent months we have seen some encouraging signs, and how one decision may open the door to greater opportunities for negotiation.

Guatemala believes that diplomacy and dialogue are the best means for achieving long-term solutions in each of the conflicts that persist in the Middle East. Seeking solutions by means other than those established under the of international law not only creates dangerous precedents, but runs counter to the very foundations of the Organization. Each of the situations that has drawn international attention, whether on the Council's agenda or not, such as those in Syria, Palestine, Yemen,

Egypt and elsewhere, has its own unique roots. But in all cases, in our view, it is important to promote open and inclusive dialogue among all the parties concerned and to push together to contain the violence and prevent further clashes.

On this occasion, I will refer to only two matters: the Middle East peace process and the conflict in Syria.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, Guatemala views it as a positive sign that the authorities in Israel and Palestine continue to seek a negotiated two-State solution through dialogue. We are aware of the immense challenges that the negotiation process presents for both parties, at the national and international levels alike. Paradoxically, the more we advance in the negotiations, the pending issues seem ever-more insurmountable. However, a viable option for peace and security would, at the end of the day, be of enormous benefit to both parties. In other words, this is not a zero-sum game, but rather a win-win situation for all.

We hope that the parties can work positively to meet the deadlines that have been set. In the same vein, we believe that the involvement of the Quartet and regional actors in the process will contribute to the attainment of a definitive solution to the conflict. We encourage both parties to continue negotiating in good faith with a view to achieving a mutually acceptable solution, and the international community to support this process.

We therefore believe that both sides should refrain from any act that may jeopardize the negotiations or the prospects for a peaceful solution to the conflict. We emphasize once again the need to cease the expansion of existing settlements and the approval of new ones, settler violence, the launching of rockets into Israel and, in general, the use of inflammatory language by both sides. We hope that the parties demonstrate their commitment to the principles that unite us and overcome the differences blocking progress towards a peaceful solution.

Regarding the situation in Syria, our message is short and simple — the violence must stop immediately. All parties must cease the use of military force to achieve their political objectives. Likewise, the international community as a whole must stop arms transfers to any of the warring parties in Syria.

We welcome the creation of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations, as well as the recent

appointment of its Special Coordinator, Ms. Sigrid Kaag. We are encouraged that, despite the fact that it is working in a conflict situation and carrying out a highly dangerous task, the Mission has been able to complete inspections of almost half of Syria's chemical arsenal. We hope that its work will continue at the same pace and can lead to the complete destruction of the chemical weapons programme in Syria by mid-2014.

We also believe that it is important to have complete and timely information on the establishment, functioning and operations of the Joint Mission. We understand that this Mission has no precedent and therefore must blaze its own trail. However, it could be argued that transparency and monitoring are therefore even more important. We also hope that all matters relating to the protection and safety of the personnel of the Mission are reported on. In this context, we also welcome the recent presidential statement issued by the Council calling for unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need of assistance in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15).

At the same time, we are aware the activities of the Joint Mission will not end the conflict. It is therefore important for the parties to hold a dialogue and seek definitive solutions to their differences, including the establishment of a transitional government. We believe that the long-delayed convening of a second conference in Geneva, which is now being announced for late November, could provide just such an opportunity. We are therefore concerned at the continuing reports of deep divisions among the Syrian opposition groups. It is important that the leadership of the opposition work to keep the unity of the groups belonging to it so as to have a strong and representative interlocutor in that conference.

We also believe that the Geneva conference should incorporate an obligation on all parties to lay down their weapons. Doing so will alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe that has resulted from the conflict. It should also be clear that the perpetrators of all crimes committed in Syria should be punished for their actions. Impunity must not be allowed to prevail in a post-conflict Syria.

Finally, Guatemala reiterates that the reconciliation of opposing positions requires holding a constructive dialogue. That is the only way to avoid greater harm which, should the trends continue, would eventually undermine the stability of the entire Middle East.

Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon (Republic of Korea): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his informative briefing. I also listened carefully to the statements made by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

Three months have passed since Israel and Palestine began negotiations in July. Although not much information has been made available about the details of the talks, the lack of information should be understandable in the light of the long history of 20 years of staggered negotiations. However, it would be naïve to simply assume that no news is good news. The deteriorating security situation in the West Bank, sporadic rocket fire from Gaza, and intermittent violence and clashes, as well as continuing settlement activities, make up the hard realities that could potentially spoil the atmosphere at any time. The Republic of Korea therefore calls for joint efforts to build mutual confidence in parallel with the talks.

The biggest challenges, however, still lie ahead. The moment of truth for both sides will come when they must overcome long-standing hurdles on substantive and sensitive issues. The role of the international community will become more instrumental as the negotiations make progress. We must encourage both parties to seize this momentum to achieve the two-State solution. Creative incentives for both parties must be explored more vigorously to facilitate the negotiating process. We expect that the Quartet will accelerate its mediation efforts at an appropriate juncture. My delegation sincerely hopes that both Israel and Palestine will remain firmly committed and reach an agreement within the agreed time frame.

On Syria, we welcome the fact that the initial phase of the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) is under way following the timely proposal of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council's endorsement of a joint mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. The Republic of Korea welcomes the appointment of Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag, and trust that she will play a critical role in keeping the work of the mission on track. Most importantly, we call on Syria to faithfully fulfil its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and as a member of the Chemical Weapons Convention. On that note, we would like to reiterate the need to find out who is responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria and hold them accountable.

Despite the recent progress, continued hostilities and the use of force in Syria are adding to the death toll and increasing human suffering. We strongly condemn continued violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, especially against women and children, who are the most affected by the crisis. We support and welcome presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of 2 October, and urge all parties to the Syrian conflict to respond to it immediately. We especially urge the Syrian authorities to take immediate steps to facilitate humanitarian assistance for various humanitarian actors on the ground by lifting bureaucratic obstacles and granting cross-border access.

The spillover of the humanitarian crisis to neighbouring countries also remains a deep concern. The deteriorating Syrian refugee situation is straining the host countries not only socioeconomically, but also politically. Among them, Lebanon and Jordan are suffering the most as refugees from Syria comprise approximately one-fourth and one-tenth of their populations, respectively. The international community must share the burden by stepping up its effort to translate its pledges into action. We applaud the neighbouring countries that continue to open their borders, as well as those countries that are participating in the resettlement of refugees from Syria.

Finally, we would like to underscore once again that we should not be satisfied with the initial stages of the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. The international community, especially the Security Council, must take further steps to bring the Syrian crisis to an end through a negotiated political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). In this respect, we hope that the “Geneva II” conference will be held as soon as possible.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing.

It is obviously true that the Middle East is experiencing dramatic turmoil, but a potentially historic opportunity has opened up in the Middle East peace process that we simply must not neglect. The emphasis placed by world leaders on final-status negotiations and the goal of a lasting two-State solution during leaders week at the General Assembly reflected the recognition that we must all engage closely with the peace process. It is widely recognized that the status quo cannot continue.

Australia commends the activism and commitment that the United States continues to show in its leadership of final-status negotiations. We welcome Secretary Kerry’s speech at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 25 September, in which he stressed how urgently a two-State solution is needed. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas also continue to display great courage and statesmanship in persisting with negotiations despite domestic pressures. We recognize that sustained efforts are necessary to negotiate the significant challenges and difficult decisions that lie ahead and in order to conclude negotiations within the nine-month time frame.

We are concerned about recent attacks that have resulted in the deaths of Israelis in the West Bank. The condemnation of such acts by Palestinian leaders is welcome and important. Earlier clashes in the West Bank, which have led to the deaths of Palestinians, are also of concern. It is vital that leaders on both sides do not let such events derail the peace efforts.

The past month has also seen an historic breakthrough in the Council’s consideration of the conflict in Syria with the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) on the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons and the presidential statement on humanitarian assistance (S/PRST/2013/15). These actions demonstrate that the international community can work together towards peace and security in Syria and the region, and we simply must continue to build on this.

Resolution 2118 (2013) demonstrates our agreed conviction that the use of chemical weapons is a grave and serious threat to international peace and security. We are giving our own full support to the Secretary-General and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in their Joint Mission to inspect and oversee the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons.

The onus now lies with the Syrian regime. It must comply in full with its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and cooperate without reservation with the United Nations-OPCW Joint Mission. The Council itself must rigorously monitor progress in Syrian compliance. Our continued engagement will be vital if the Mission is to succeed.

While progress on chemical weapons is welcome, only a political solution can resolve the crisis. We

support efforts to convene a second Geneva conference in November. We urge both the Syrian regime and the opposition to participate constructively in these talks. We call on those with influence on the parties in Syria to facilitate the process.

The Syrian people need a political solution for their future, but today they also need food, medical care, shelter and protection. As the presidential statement on humanitarian access adopted on 2 October made clear, the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis requires immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country. Sieges must stop; all parties, and particularly the Syrian authorities, must ensure that access is provided by the most effective means. We support calls for ceasefires to allow assistance.

The Council must monitor closely and systematically the adherence of all parties to the provisions of the presidential statement of 2 October (S/PRST/2013/15), and we support an early briefing to the Council by Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos. Already the conflict is taking a dramatic toll on the security and stability of the region, and without a resolution the threat to international peace can only grow. Neighbouring countries have seen growing sectarian violence and cross-border violations by parties aligned to the Syrian conflict. They play host to huge numbers of displaced Syrians. All neighbouring countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, need the support of the international community as they struggle to contain the effects of the Syrian conflict.

We agree with the concerns expressed by others today about Lebanon. The Council must reaffirm its support to the sovereignty and stability of that country. My own country stands ready to work through the Council to do whatever we can to alleviate this terrible crisis.

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

We thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing. The past couple of weeks have been remarkable in terms of the revitalization of the Middle East peace process, and the continuation of the direct talks between the parties. We welcome the recent meeting of the Middle East Quartet, which was held on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 27 September. We hope that the parties will demonstrate continued dedication and good faith to the quest for a lasting solution. Among

the necessary prerequisites for success is the need to ensure that the process and all efforts are guided by normative standards set by the Charter of the United Nations, as well as by the objective of a comprehensive settlement based on international law.

We have repeatedly stated that the lack of agreement on political issues in situations of armed conflict and military occupation cannot be used as a pretext for failing to uphold international law and human rights. Settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory remains a matter of serious concern. No doubt, the increase in new settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem may adversely affect the delicate situation on the ground. They constitute a serious threat to the peace process and infringe upon the rights and freedoms of the Palestinians.

Such practices are illegal under international law, and they must be stopped immediately and unconditionally, regardless of the course of negotiations and their outcome. Pursuant to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 12 August 1949, “[t]he Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” That both constitutes the basis of and explains the rule of law prohibiting the establishment of settlements in the occupied territories consisting of the population of the occupying Power, or of persons encouraged by that Power to settle in those territories with the intention, expressed or otherwise, of changing the demographic balance.

The Council must take all necessary measures to ensure that international law, human rights and fundamental freedoms are observed and respected at all times and without preconditions.

The economic, financial and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory requires the constant attention of the international community. Further easing of restrictions on the Palestinians’ movement, the providing of access, and the easing of financial restrictions are necessary. The continued support of the international community for a socioeconomic revival of the State of Palestine is very important. We are convinced that there is no room for religious or ethnic intolerance in the Middle East. People must live together, hence they must seek ways of building peace and good-neighbourly relations in the region.

With regard to Syria, we welcome the efforts carried out so far towards the fulfilment of the objectives laid down in resolution 2118 (2013) and the relevant decision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Executive Council. It is imperative that all parties cease armed violence, engage constructively in the political process and commit to the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

The convening of the “Geneva II” conference in the coming weeks is necessary to bring about the parties’ engagement in dialogue and negotiation. In conclusion, we would like once again to express our firm conviction that peace and security in the Middle East is possible through the dedication and hard work of all involved, and with the indispensable support of the international community.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I also wish to inform all concerned that this open debate will continue through the lunch hour as we have a very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council in October. I would also like to commend the Permanent Representative of Australia and his team for their excellent work during their presidency last month.

When faced with challenges threatening the core of their stability and security, countries explore all ways and means to build partnerships, strengthen them, and establish safety nets.

In that context, Lebanon reiterates its commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), unanimously adopted by this organ on 11 August 2006. Likewise, over the past seven years, everyone present here has been expressing their unwavering support for the full implementation of the above-mentioned resolution. Thus, we believe that this is an opportune moment for the Council to translate its support into a

strong message urging Israel to completely withdraw from the remaining Lebanese occupied territory, to end its violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, air and sea and to refrain from taking unilateral action that violates its obligations under international law.

Convinced of the importance of a stable Lebanon for the maintenance of peace and security in the region, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/9) on 11 July, renewing its support for Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and endorsing Lebanon’s disassociation policy vis-a-vis the situation in Syria, as well as the Baabda Declaration of 11 June 2012. Again, let me reiterate my country’s deep appreciation for that message of political solidarity.

Capitalizing on the consensus articulated in the aforementioned presidential statement, on 25 September the Secretary-General launched the International Support Group for Lebanon, stressing the need for

“strong, coordinated international support for Lebanon to help it continue to withstand the multiple current challenges to its security and stability” (S/PRST/2013/9, p. 3).

Lebanon looks forward to the enlargement of that group, and the convening of follow-up meetings to address its specific needs for coping with the humanitarian crisis resulting from the influx of refugees from Syria, to enhance the Lebanese army’s capabilities and to provide for Lebanon’s economic and financial needs.

With the ongoing Syrian crisis, the number of refugees from Syria has come to represent the equivalent of one fourth of the population of my country. Over and above the obvious humanitarian challenges, a recent World Bank report has underlined the severe negative socioeconomic impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The report notes that

“the Lebanese growth is estimated to be down by 2.9% this year ... Government expenditures will increase by an estimated \$1.1 billion over the 2012 to 2014 period ... while its revenues will drop by \$1.5 billion. Unemployment could reach 20 per cent over the same period. More than 170,000 Lebanese will be pushed into poverty by 2014.”

In his address to the General Assembly last month, the President of the Republic of Lebanon, General Michel Sleiman, warned that this grave situation has begun to have an “existential dimension” for

my country. In his meeting in Beirut last week with representatives of the members of the International Support Group, he stressed that the financial burden-sharing is still insufficient. He said the relocation of refugees remains symbolic — 17 countries have hosted only a few thousand refugees, while the international community faces difficulties in providing them shelter within Syria, notwithstanding that Syria is 18 times larger than Lebanon.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), regarding the chemical weapons in Syria, and the presidential statement of 2 October of this year on the humanitarian situation there (S/PRST/2013/15). Lebanon considers that those united actions by the international community should lead to putting an end to violence, provide for a safe and dignified gradual return of Syrian refugees to their country and pave the way to a political process that will fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people.

On 31 July, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations resumed, owing to the efforts of the United States Administration and with an initial time frame of nine months to achieve progress. Like many other countries, we commended the United States efforts in that regard and were ready to see signs of hope in them.

However, three months into the set time frame, and in spite of many rounds of talks, Israeli authorities continue settlement expansion. The Peace Now movement, along with other Israeli commentators and human rights organizations, could see in that only a lack on the part of their Government to a “genuine intention to negotiate seriously”. Moreover, empowered with a sense of impunity, Israeli settlers multiply their assaults on Palestinian civilians and their properties, attacking elementary schools and terrorizing children, robbing farmers of their livelihood by uprooting their olive trees, and vandalizing churches and mosques. Clearly, such actions threaten to undermine the prospects for the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The Council must condemn them in the strongest terms.

Finally, need we remind the Council that such negotiations have to be part of a comprehensive and inclusive approach if a durable and sustainable peace in the Middle East is to be attained?

The President: I give the floor to the representative of India.

Ms. Kaur (India): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of October.

I am honoured to speak in the debate. Let me also express our appreciation to you for convening the quarterly open debate, which allows the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffery Feltman, for his comprehensive briefing.

The resolution of the Palestinian question remains an urgent and key issue for the international community. It is a prerequisite for building a sustainable and lasting peace in the Middle East region. Given the evolving situation in the region and its inherent fragility and unpredictability, it is necessary that there be no more delay in the resolution of the Palestinian question.

We are encouraged by the ongoing direct talks between Israel and Palestine, facilitated by the United States. We hope that the direct talks, which have resumed after one of the longest periods of stalemate since the signing of the Oslo Accords, will lead to concrete results within the time frame of nine months envisaged by the United States Secretary of State, Mr John Kerry. In this context, it is necessary to address the issue of Israeli settlement activities, which are continuing unabated. Those activities are not only illegal, but also pose a serious threat to the two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities.

The blockade of Gaza has had serious consequences for the lives of Palestinians. It has also adversely affected essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. We continue to hold that it is necessary for Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza and allow normal and unrestricted movement of persons and goods within Palestine.

India remains steadfast in its support for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue that results in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet road map, various United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Given the financial difficulties that the Palestinian Authority continues to face, India remains committed to supporting the Palestinian Authority bilaterally as

well as through the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) fund. Bilaterally, we continue to partner with the Palestinian Authority by providing development support and assistance through direct budgetary support, contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, training and more. Through the IBSA fund, we will continue to undertake capacity-building and infrastructure projects that are prioritized by the Palestinian Authority.

As demonstrated over the past six decades, including during its memberships in the Security Council, India also stands ready to support all measures that the Palestinian leadership may take towards political resolution of the final status issues.

Before I conclude, I would like to express our deep concern about the situation in Syria. While we welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and the presidential statement on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15), we are concerned at the continuing violence and the worsening humanitarian situation. We have long held that there is no military solution to the conflict. We continue to think that an inclusive political dialogue to resolve the crisis should remain the focus of the United Nations, including the Council. We look forward to an early holding of the "Geneva II" conference, which should help commence a Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue that resolves the current crisis and meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of October. We are convinced that under your guidance that our work will be successful. We would like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing today.

Egypt supports the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statement to be made by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

I would like to emphasize the following six points.

First, Egypt backs the negotiations currently under way between the State of Palestine and Israel to achieve a peace agreement that is lasting in nature. We wish to pay tribute to the efforts of the United States of America, which have allowed for the negotiations to be relaunched. We hope they will be crowned with success, success that will lead to a two-State solution. However, we are concerned over basic differences between the two parties that will be difficult to overcome. We urge the occupying Power, Israel, which possesses all the means to control and the necessary force on the ground, to take all the necessary steps to achieve a two-State solution before it is too late to do so.

Secondly, today we heard the Israeli representative deny the fact that the Palestinian issue lies at the very heart of the conflict in the Middle East and use the current situation in the Middle East to renege on Israel's responsibilities. We are convinced that a solution in the Middle East will enable us to build democratic stable regimes, which we have heard some speakers here deny. They believe that such developments will contribute only to instability and bloodshed in the region.

We stress the fact that a failure to find a solution to the Palestinian issue would threaten the occupying State above all. We have examined the statistics on the resumption of settlement construction in the West Bank, which show a threefold increase since the signature of the Oslo agreements from 1993 to 2012. We are also alarmed by the increase in illegal settlement activity carried out by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which has grown 70 per cent this year compared with the same period last year.

That leads us to question the message of the Israeli Government at a time when it claims to be engaging in negotiations. We condemn its illegal activities and invite the international community resolutely to end them, including through the imposition of sanctions on Israeli settlements in line with the measures undertaken by a number of international stakeholders, including the European Union, whose guidelines will enter into force at the beginning of next year. We warn against any attempts to circumvent those sanctions.

Thirdly, Egypt condemns ongoing Israeli actions against the Palestinian people, including the blockade of Gaza and the terrorism carried out by Israeli settlers against unarmed Palestinians. As the occupying Power, Israel bears full responsibility for the situation. It must therefore lift its unfair blockade of the Gaza Strip. We

also condemn systematic Israeli violations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the provocations of extremist Israeli settlers there under the cover of the heightened Israeli security presence. We ask for an end to be put to Jewish sloganeering in the mosque.

Fourthly, Egypt expresses its concerns regarding the decrease in funds made available to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the deterioration of its financial situation. The demonstration by hundreds of Palestinian refugees in Gaza against a reduction in the basic services and systems provided by UNRWA will have an impact on the credibility of the United Nations and its role in the nation.

Fifthly, Egypt rejects the use of the terrible situation in Syria as an excuse for disregarding the ongoing Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan. We demand that Israel withdraw from the Golan and implement United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981). We stress the need for the Council to be briefed on that issue in order to achieve a necessary settlement of that issue.

Sixthly, we welcome the agreement for the destruction and elimination of Syrian chemical weapons pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013). We believe that this new measure will enable us to destroy weapons of mass destruction in the region and that it complements others that have been adopted but not fully implemented, such as resolution 687 (1991), whose implementation was limited to the destruction of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, despite the fact that the resolution was supposedly designed to eliminate weapons of mass destruction throughout the region.

Egypt takes this opportunity to remind members of the proposal made by my Minister of Foreign Affairs within the framework of the general debate at the General Assembly this year (see A/68/PV.18) on the need to turn the Middle East into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, and to convene in 2014 the conference that was planned for 2012. We invite the permanent members of the Council to assume their responsibilities and to invite all States of the region to provide the necessary guarantees before the end of the year.

The Palestinian issue is and remains the main reason for instability in the Middle East; an instability that threatens peace and stability, especially international peace and stability. Egypt will continue to demand

that the Security Council assume its responsibilities and address the Palestinian issue in the appropriate manner. We also insist on the need to put an end to illegal Israeli settlement activities in order to achieve a definitive solution, and to implement past resolutions on creating in the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, which are the real threat to peace and stability throughout the world.

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

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine for their statements.

Since the most recent open debate on this item in July (see S/PV.7007), encouraging political developments have taken place in the Middle East. After years of procrastination and virtual paralysis, a new dynamic may be emerging as a prospect for progress on the Syrian and on the Israeli-Palestinian tracks appears.

On the Syrian crisis, a military intervention has been avoided by diplomacy. It is hard to reconcile the need to protect civilians in Syria with the option of a military solution, which would in all likelihood only trigger more suffering and instability. Brazil welcomes the convergence of views between the United States and Russia that generated momentum for the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) and led to the endorsement of the final communiqué of the Geneva Action Group of June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex).

Brazil unequivocally condemns the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the ensuing loss of lives. We welcome the Syrian Government's decision to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention and to apply it immediately. As one of the original signatories of the Convention, we will continue to press for the universalization of that instrument and urge those countries that have not yet adhered to do so at the earliest possible date.

The Syrian Government must continue to cooperate fully with the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the implementation of its obligations. The opposition must also cooperate. In case of non-compliance, it is clear from the text of resolution 2118 (2013) that authorization

for measures under Chapter VII can be contemplated only through a new Security Council resolution.

We reiterate our belief that there is no military solution to the conflict, and call for the cessation of all arms supply to all parties to the Syrian conflict. While welcoming the effort towards the elimination of chemical weapons, we must not forget that the brunt of civilian deaths in Syria is caused by conventional weapons, which continue to flow.

All parties should seize the new impetus and follow the path of a negotiated political solution that takes into consideration the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The Geneva communiqué should be implemented as a matter of urgency. Brazil renews its support for Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, as well as for the prompt convening of the "Geneva II" conference. In that regard, we consider that, in addition to regional stakeholders, other players who could contribute to the success of the conference should be invited to participate.

We renew our condemnation of all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties and call for immediate humanitarian access to those in need. The Government in Damascus bears the largest share of responsibility for the cycle of violence that has victimized a large number of civilians, especially women, children and youth. It is the duty of the Government to protect its citizens. We are also aware of the responsibilities of the armed opposition.

In the same vein, in line with the findings contained in the report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/21/50), we reiterate our grave concern at the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on the living conditions of the Syrian people. We praise the efforts of neighbouring countries to host Syrian refugees and underscore the principle of burden-sharing. Let me also express Brazil's strong support for the policy of Lebanon, under President Michel Sleiman, of dissociation from the Syrian conflict.

Brazil welcomes the resumption of direct final-status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and commends the efforts of United States Secretary of State Kerry to that effect. We hope that the current talks will lead to the realization of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and call on the parties to adhere to the agreed upon time frame of nine months to reach a comprehensive peace agreement.

We underscore that the process must lead to a final peace agreement, not an interim one. To that end, it is Brazil's expectation that negotiations deal with all main subjects.

The continuing settlement activities and settler violence against civilians in Palestine constitute violations of international law. They are contrary to the required improvement of the atmosphere for negotiations to reach a successful outcome and harmful to the two-State solution itself. Brazil condemned the recent launches of rockets and mortar shells from Gaza and Syria into Israel. We welcome Israel's decision to release Palestinian prisoners and encourage Israel to set free a new group, as soon as possible.

In that context, there is even more reason to call on the Security Council to fully exercise its functions with regard to the Palestinian question and provide support for the peace process. Brazil also expects that the Quartet, whose statement of 27 September was a welcome development after a long period of silence, report regularly to the Security Council.

In order to provide broader support for the first serious effort at a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in such a long time, serious consideration should be given to the establishment of a support group to the Quartet, with wider geographical representation.

The current negotiation process presents an opportunity that must not be missed. Brazil has been emphasizing the importance of listening to Israeli and Palestinian civil societies. A number of organizations from both sides can contribute significantly to galvanizing the political will for peace. Brazil will be, as usual, ready to provide its support to initiatives, including those that involve representatives from civil societies, in order to work towards reconciliation and sustainable peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I congratulate you, Sir, on the occasion of your assumption of the Security Council presidency for this month, and in particular assure you of the full support of the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his detailed and objective briefing.

The last time I addressed the Council, in July (see S/PV.7007), shortly after the announcement of the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, I called for the long-term commitment of the international community to ensuring that the parties honour promises negotiated in good faith and refrain from any action that could jeopardize the negotiations. We welcome the parties' commitment to achieving an overall agreement within nine months, and we await evidence of real progress. We are encouraged by the recent announcement that United States mediation efforts will focus on accelerating the negotiations. We welcome the long-awaited resumption of the Quartet's activities and its willingness to convene monthly meetings to monitor progress. We believe, however, that the Council has not yet taken full measure of its peacebuilding capacities with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Alarming signs on both sides indicate that groups with a stake in continued conflict are continuing to mobilize. It is therefore imperative that the international community — especially the Security Council, pursuant to its role in the maintenance of international peace and security — remain vigilant and act urgently and decisively to counter provocative acts during this sensitive time and ensure respect for international law and protect civilians.

The ongoing announcements of Israeli settlement activity — such as those just constructed in East Jerusalem — remain of concern and poison the climate of negotiations. We urge the Council to take action towards implementation of resolution 446 (1979). The European Union order concerning the financing of projects in the Israeli settlements is commendable and should be fully implemented. We encourage other States to act in tandem.

The international community must exert real pressure in order to force the Israeli Government to halt its settlement activity and to compromise at the negotiating table. We are also concerned about provocative acts carried in the area of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the increasing number of attacks during the olive harvest carried out by settlers against Palestinians. The raids conducted in the Palestinian territories further fuel tensions. Similarly, the explosive issue of the thousands of Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons remains a main concern of the Committee.

We ought to have since improvements on the ground since the policy initiatives that I have mentioned

were undertaken, which would have leant greater credibility to the negotiating process. Paradoxically, the Palestinians are facing an economic contraction, increased budget deficits and mass unemployment. In Gaza, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating.

Nevertheless, the Committee believes that measures to stimulate the economy, including donor support, can contribute to economic improvements. However, they must be accompanied by an overall lifting of the restrictions imposed by the occupying Power. According to the World Bank, those restrictions cost the Palestinian economy \$3.4 billion a year, in the West Bank alone. It should be noted that all estimates of the economic damage caused by the occupation lead to the same conclusion, namely, that the Palestinian economy would have prospered if it was not the object of such coercive measures.

Our Committee places high expectations on the current round of negotiations. It will therefore remain fully committed to tirelessly supporting the peace initiative currently under way. We urge the Council to make use of its political and moral authority in seeking a definitive and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazae (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also avail myself of this opportunity to express my appreciation to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing to the Council today.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains seriously concerned about the situation in Palestine as a result of the illegal policies that continue to be pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and their land. Over the past months, while the international community has been awaiting tangible progress in the resumed negotiations between the two sides and has articulated its full support for that process on the basis of the long-standing parameters rooted in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, the occupying Power has, regrettably, continued to

behave in a manner contradictory to those parameters, to the good faith required for the negotiations and to the overarching objectives of the peace process. Tensions have thus continued to rise, widening the gap between the hopes and expectations for the political process and the reality on the ground. Israeli settlement activities, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, military raids and constant provocations, including incitement to religious conflict by extremist Israeli settlers, are exacerbating the conditions on the ground and reinforcing doubts regarding Israel's desire for, or commitment to, the peace that the State of Palestine, with the strong support of the international community, including NAM countries, has been earnestly seeking and remains committed to achieving.

NAM is extremely alarmed in particular by the escalation of acts of aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, especially in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which continue to be the result of provocations by Israeli extremists, including settlers and Government officials. The blatant disrespect for that holy site and its worshippers and the continued threats of further incursions are tantamount to grave acts of incitement that are stoking religious sensitivities and aggravating already elevated tensions. Israeli officials continue to recklessly fuel religious tensions by encouraging extremists to acts of provocation that threaten to ignite a religious conflict, with far-reaching and dangerous consequences for the region and beyond. NAM therefore once again draws the Security Council's attention to that serious matter, which constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and calls for actions to halt all such Israeli incitement and for respect for the sanctity of religious sites.

NAM also reiterates its serious concern regarding the continued and systematic Israeli violence and human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians in violent military raids, the excessive use of force against civilian protesters, the forced displacement of civilians and the arrest and detention of more Palestinians. Israel's settlement activities and construction of the wall have also continued in the recent period throughout the Palestinian land through myriad illegal means and measures, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and numerous United Nations resolutions.

The illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip also remains of serious concern, as it continues to inflict grave

socioeconomic losses and humanitarian hardship on the Palestinian people besieged there. NAM condemns those violations and urges the international community to persist with its calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to respect its obligations under international law and to cease all such illegal actions and violence against the Palestinian people under its occupation.

The ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement Committee on Palestine met on 26 September in New York, reviewed the recent developments on the political track and on the ground in Palestine and reaffirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their support for their just cause to realize their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine and to achieve a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects. They expressed hope that the current negotiations would succeed within the specified time frame and result in the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that would bring an end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian and other occupied Arab lands.

The Non-Aligned Movement therefore renews its calls, at this most critical juncture, for continued support and assistance to the Palestinian people in their legitimate historic struggle for justice, dignity, peace and the exercise of their right to self-determination. NAM calls further for a redoubling of international efforts, including by the Security Council and in line with our political, legal and moral obligations, towards the realization of these noble objectives, so as to usher in a new era of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Lebanon has suffered from consecutive Israeli attacks against its territory, with a heavy human and material toll, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese airspace, while intensifying its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of Syrian crisis. The

Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In my national capacity, with regard to the statement made today by the representative of the Israeli regime against my country, it will be enough to quote a Persian saying: “The rage and anger of your criminal and aggressor enemy is a good indication that you are on the right track.”

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

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): As I take the floor in the Security Council for the first time as the new Permanent Representative of Japan, I would like to say how pleased I am to participate in the deliberations of the Council and express my readiness to work with you, Mr. President, and the members of the Council in the coming years.

Today, I wish to touch upon two issues — first on the Middle East peace process, and secondly on the situation in Syria. First, let me start with the Middle East peace process.

Japan welcomes the resumption of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians realized through the mediation efforts of the United States. We remain committed to assisting Palestinian State-building efforts in order to create a proper environment for achieving peace through a two-State solution. Sustainable economic development is indispensable to establishing a viable Palestinian State. Allow me to introduce two concrete initiatives of Japan in this regard.

The first is a project called the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity. In our view, agriculture and agro-industry are a driving force for the Palestinian economy. The Corridor project is thus designed to transform an area of the Jordan Valley into productive and fertile land, thereby allowing Palestinians to export agricultural products. The project is also expected to create employment in the West Bank. Regional cooperation is key to that end, as the project involves not only Palestine but also Israel and Jordan.

Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan launched this initiative in July 2006 when he visited Israel, Palestine and Jordan. I was given the task to design the project

in my capacity as Director-General for the Middle East and Africa at our Foreign Ministry. Although there was some skepticism in the beginning, steady progress has been made since 2006. One Palestinian company has already decided to participate in its flagship project, the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, and several companies have expressed interest in joining. The park’s beneficial economic effects are estimated at more than \$40 million per year. About 7,000 jobs can also be created.

A ministerial-level meeting was held in Jericho in July this year under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Kishida of Japan. Ministers from Israel, Palestine and Jordan participated. The meeting served as an important opportunity of confidence-building among the participants and reaffirmed the importance of moving forward the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity project. We look forward to welcoming private companies from the Middle East and other regions of the world joining the project. The plan for business expansion in the West Bank and Gaza announced by United States Secretary of State, Mr. Kerry, in May also aims at promoting local entrepreneurs, which we strongly support.

The second Japanese initiative is the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development. The Conference, launched in February this year in Tokyo, is a process aimed at mobilizing and sharing East Asian experiences and resources deriving from their economic development for the sake of Palestinian development. A second meeting of Conference will take place under the Indonesian chairmanship early next year.

I very much hope that the Security Council will take into account not only the political aspects, but also the economic incentives to the peace process, when it discusses this very important subject.

Turning to the situation in Syria, Japan, like others, welcomes the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), as well as the establishment of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations. I also join others in extending wholehearted congratulations to the OPCW on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Since the inception of the OPCW in 1997, Japan has made significant contributions to the activities of the organization in its capacity as the second-largest financial contributor and as a member of the Executive Council. The first Director of the Inspectorate at OPCW was Major General Ichiro Akiyama of Japan.

As my Prime Minister, Mr. Abe, expressed at the general debate in September (see A/68/PV.12), Japan will provide the greatest possible cooperation towards the disposal of Syria's chemical weapons. My Government will consider concrete cooperation based on relevant information with respect to global needs and the implementation scheme for destroying Syrian chemical weapons.

Despite progress in the field of chemical weapons, we must not turn our eyes away from the appalling humanitarian situation in Syria and the lack of progress in the peace process. Faced with this deplorable situation, Japan will continue to proactively provide humanitarian assistance — now totaling \$155 million — to refugees and neighbouring countries. With the \$60 million pledged by Prime Minister Abe last month, Japan will support various international organizations in caring for internally displaced persons and refugees in and around Syria. Japan will also provide bilateral assistance to Jordan and Lebanon. Furthermore, we will extend a helping hand to areas under the control of opposition groups where it is difficult for assistance from international organizations to reach.

Let me recall, however, that humanitarian assistance cannot be an end in itself. Now is the time for the international community to seize the window of opportunity with a view to stopping the violence and bringing about a political solution. The successful convening of the "Geneva II" conference is of utmost importance in this regard. Japan is always ready to participate in the Geneva II conference and to make further contributions to resolving the Syrian crisis.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): Allow me first to thank you, Sir, for organizing this open debate. I would also like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

Amid the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, the Palestinian question continues to lie at the heart of the challenges that we face in the region. Turkey has always supported a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, sitting side by side with us on an equal footing under this roof and living side by side in peace and security with Israel. The revival of the Middle East peace process and the successful completion of comprehensive peace negotiations between the parties

for a just and lasting solution have become increasingly critical against the backdrop of the recent developments in the region.

The denial of the right of the Palestinians to have a State of their own has no justification on any moral, political or legal grounds. In the absence of an immediate and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, the prospects for regional peace, cooperation and well-being will be only an elusive dream.

In this respect, we welcome and support the ongoing peace talks that were relaunched last July by the Palestinian and Israeli leadership. We also appreciate the commitment and efforts of the United States Secretary of State. We view as a positive development the statement issued by the Quartet in September on its determination to lend effective support to the efforts of the parties and commitment to reaching a permanent status agreement within nine months. However, it is also apparent that the window of opportunity for a comprehensive solution narrows as time goes by. We cannot afford to miss another opportunity for peace and stability in the region.

We therefore encourage the parties to continue negotiations in a sincere, decisive and dedicated manner and to vigilantly avoid actions that might jeopardize the process. The parties must act in good faith, build confidence through a settlement freeze, prisoner release and security arrangements for both sides. We also believe that any provocative step against holy sites, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque, must be avoided. I would like to reiterate once again that, as always, Turkey, is ready to contribute to all international efforts towards a just and lasting settlement.

We are concerned, however, by Israel's continuing illegal settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Israel's expansionist policy remains a major obstacle to meaningful negotiations and undermines the prospects for a negotiated two-State solution. We are dismayed by the approval of more than 3,000 settlement units since the announcement of the resumption of the negotiations. We continue to be worried by Israeli settler violence, as reflected in land usurpation, the destruction of olive trees and provocative actions against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, together with the harsh measures taken by Israeli security forces. Those actions may trigger a widespread reaction and be detrimental to the ongoing talks.

The situation of Palestinian prisoners, including children and women, under Israeli custody remains another source of concern. The Palestinian Ministry of Detainees recently announced that currently 5,200 Palestinians were being kept in Israeli prisons, detention camps and interrogation facilities. UNICEF's latest report reveals ongoing violations against children in Israeli military detention.

The international community must be firm in its condemnation and rejection of those and other unacceptable Israeli actions — *inter alia*, restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods — which constitute attempts to artificially change the demographic and multicultural identity of Jerusalem.

The illegal blockade of Gaza is another issue of major concern. All restrictions on Gaza are unsustainable and counterproductive. As the ceasefire persists, a further easing of restrictions must follow. The deteriorating economic, social and humanitarian conditions in Gaza as a result of the restrictions adversely affect the already fragile situation in the region. We have noted with concern the recent reports by various international organizations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and United Nations agencies, that restrictions on Palestine are the primary source of the continued deterioration of the Palestinian economy.

Turkey has taken urgent action to alleviate some emerging vital shortages, including providing fuel for generators for critical services such health, water and sanitation in Gaza. We have decided to send another urgent dispatch of flour supplies to Gaza, amounting to 10,000 tons this year, via the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the transfer of which will start on 28 October.

As part of the peace efforts, we welcome the economic initiative of the Quartet, which aims at bringing economic growth to the Palestinian economy. However, any economic initiative alone cannot be regarded as a substitute for a genuine political settlement. Unless there is substantial progress towards a just and lasting peace based on a two-State solution, economic initiatives will hardly be a substitute for freedom, independence and full sovereignty. Only a political solution can pave the way to a sustainable economic life and prosperity in Palestine.

In the meantime, Turkey will continue to fully support Palestinian reconciliation, which we believe constitutes one of the pillars for lasting peace in the Middle East. We strongly support the goal of establishing a unity Government that embraces the Palestinian people as a whole.

The situation in Syria continues to be the greatest humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century. The crisis continues to threaten regional peace and security, while inflicting a grave burden on Syria's neighbours. The number of Syrians in neighbouring countries has reached more than 2 million, 600,000 of whom are currently in Turkey.

The report of the investigation mission that was made public on 17 September serves to confirm our general evaluation of the 21 August incident with regard to the use of chemical weapons by the regime in Syria. We welcome the fact that, following that report, the Security Council was finally able to act in unity on the issue of Syria, with a view to the elimination of Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons. We also welcome the establishment of the United Nations-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Mission, tasked with guiding that process. However, we firmly believe that the rapid and unconditional implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) is crucial and that there should be consequences for noncompliance.

Having said that, the conflict in Syria neither began with the use of chemical weapons, nor will it end with a resolution to eliminate them. The agreement to destroy Syria's chemical arsenal must not allow the regime to avoid responsibility for its other crimes. We should not lose sight of the fact that more than 100,000 people have been killed by regime's use of conventional weapons.

There is therefore an immediate need for a political solution that paves the way for a democratic transition in accordance with the legitimate demands of the Syrian people. We therefore repeat our support for the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive authorities, in line with the provisions of the Geneva final communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Let me conclude by reiterating that 2013 is a vital year for peace in the Middle East. It is now time for sincere and concrete action. We need to seize any momentum that would help to revitalize the talks between the parties and take concerted action towards a two-State solution in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map

and the Arab Peace Initiative. The success of future efforts mainly depends upon the Israeli Government's acceptance of the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. There is also a need for the presence of a reconciled and unified Palestinian front under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. Turkey is ready to contribute to all international efforts to that end.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Hallergard: I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this debate. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman for his briefing this morning.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The European Union continues to be extremely concerned about the deteriorating situation in Syria, which makes it all the more urgent to put an end to all violence and to the suffering of the Syrian people, and find a political solution that meets their legitimate aspirations. We condemn the unprecedented use of force by the regime. We also condemn the continuing widespread and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in Syria, including increasing attacks on religious and ethnic communities. Only a political solution that results in a united, inclusive and democratic Syria can end the terrible bloodshed and grave violations of human rights.

The European Union supports a vision of Syria that will live up to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people for a free, open and inclusive political system in which all Syrians are involved and enjoy equal rights regardless of their origin, affiliation, religion or beliefs, while recognizing an important role for women in society.

The European Union welcomes the call by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for a peace conference to be held in Geneva before the end of November. We urge all sides to the conflict to respond positively to that call and to adhere publicly to a credible political transition based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The EU reiterates that the objective of the conference must be the swift establishment, by mutual consent, of a transitional

governing body with full executive powers and control of all governmental and all security institutions. The European Union also considers that, in full conformity with the Geneva communiqué, the parties will have to agree during the conference on clear and irreversible steps and a short time frame for the political transition. International participants in "Geneva II" should adhere to the principles included in the communiqué.

The European Union calls on the opposition to come together and participate actively at the conference and encourages the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to take a leading role during negotiations. We stand ready to continue engaging with and to support the Coalition in those endeavours and in its relations with the international community at large.

The European Union stood united in condemning in the strongest terms the horrific chemical attack perpetrated on 21 August. That attack constituted a blatant violation of international law, which amounts to a crime against humanity and a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Those crimes, as well as other atrocities and human rights violations and abuses, must be investigated and perpetrators and those ordering the crimes must be held accountable. The European Union reaffirms that there should be no impunity for any such violations, including those committed with either chemical and conventional weapons or other means, and recalls that the Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the ICC, as requested in the Swiss letter to the Council of 14 January 2013 (S/2013/19, annex), at any time.

We are seriously concerned about the growing involvement of extremist and non-State foreign actors in the fighting in Syria, which is further fuelling the conflict and posing a threat to regional stability. We call on all the relevant parties to refrain from supporting such groups.

The European Union welcomed the decision of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and resolution 2118 (2013), which mandated that the Syrian Arab Republic eliminate all chemical-weapons material and equipment by the first half of 2014. The Syrian Arab Republic must now meet all its obligations in the most complete, diligent and transparent manner. The European Union calls on all sides to ensure that the inspectors have free and unfettered access to all sites. The European Union and its individual member States

are giving concrete support to the Joint Mission of the United Nations-OPCW in carrying out its important and urgent tasks and stand ready to consider further support.

As the largest donor, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to continuing to provide assistance, including humanitarian aid, to the Syrian people — assistance that now amounts to close to €2 billion. Yesterday the Foreign Affairs Council agreed on common EU messages on humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis, to which I would like to refer.

All efforts must be made to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches all people in need in Syria and that full access is granted to humanitarian aid agencies. We welcomed the Security Council presidential statement of 2 October on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15). It should be fully implemented, and we welcome the efforts being made by the United Nations, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, in that regard. All parties, especially the Syrian authorities, must take all appropriate measures to facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need of assistance throughout the entirety of Syrian territory, including across conflict lines and borders with neighbouring countries. We call on all sides of the conflict to allow for local ceasefires to facilitate humanitarian work and to respect all obligations under international humanitarian law.

The EU expresses deep concern for the fate of the millions of internally displaced persons and refugees, and commends those countries that are keeping their borders open in order to provide safe havens for refugees. The EU renews its commitment to respond to humanitarian needs in Syria and its neighbours. We recognize that the dramatic situation of refugees affecting neighbouring countries is also of growing concern to countries beyond the immediate vicinity of Syria, and is having an impact on them as well.

To facilitate an effective settlement of the crisis, the EU will continue its engagement with, and support to, the Syrian National Coalition, including in areas under the Coalition's control. The EU welcomes the creation by the Group of Friends of the Syrian People of a Syria recovery trust fund as an important step towards ensuring that the assistance the people of Syria need is properly delivered.

With regard to the Middle East peace process and the ongoing direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians aimed at a comprehensive peace between the two sides, the European Union remains fully supportive of the process and is committed to helping to ensure its success. The European Union commends the courageous leadership shown by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas in that context, as well as the crucial role played by the United States and the support expressed by the League of Arab States. We trust that such leadership will be the basis needed for substantial decisions to be taken on the key issues with regard to a viable two-State solution.

The European Union recalls its commitment to support the parties' quest for a comprehensive agreement on all final status issues, within the agreed nine-month timeframe. We urge all parties to refrain from actions that could undermine the negotiation process and the prospects for peace. We will not lose sight of developments on the ground, and we will continue to act in accordance with our well-known principles and positions and with international law and international humanitarian law. As negotiations progress, the EU intends to give further concrete form to its support, in line with what will be agreed on by the parties, and keeping in mind the EU's determination to contribute to a new era of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. The EU is concerned with the dramatic shortfall in fiscal revenue due to slowing economic development in the Palestinian territory. The EU is the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, and we call on other donors, especially those in the region, to increase their financial support to it.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to turn briefly to the situation in Lebanon. The EU welcomes the establishment in New York on 25 September of an international support group for Lebanon. We will continue to uphold our commitment as the largest donor in Lebanon, supporting the country in addressing humanitarian, economic and security challenges. Given the magnitude of those challenges, it is of the utmost urgency that a Government be formed in Lebanon.

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

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): More than two and a half years ago, the unrest in Syria began, with unforeseen, horrific consequences. A country is in ruins. Iceland condemns the use of chemical

weapons in Syria in the strongest possible terms. We also condemn all other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in the country, regardless of the perpetrators. The latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/24/46) states that the perpetrators of those violations and crimes, on all sides, do not fear accountability and that referral to justice is imperative. Iceland agrees, and reiterates its request to the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

We welcome resolution 2118 (2013), which requires the verification and destruction of chemical-weapon stockpiles in Syria. We also welcome efforts to convene a second Geneva conference in November. In the light of the open debate on women and peace and security in the Security Council last Friday (see S/PV.7044), Iceland would like to stress the importance of women as mediators and their role at the negotiating table. Women's participation in peace negotiations is fundamental to ensuring results, and now is the time to put our words into action and have women actively involved in a Geneva conference, to ensure that their rights will be protected and promoted in any future political solution in Syria.

Journalists are our eyes and ears in conflict zones. It is therefore vital that journalists be granted free access, so that they can report without obstruction. They have a right to the same protection as civilians, as the Council recognized in resolution 1738 (2006). In Syria, however, they are operating under extremely dangerous circumstances, with 28 journalists killed in the country last year. That has to change, and journalists' freedom of movement throughout the country, as well as a non-discriminatory visa policy for them, as called for in the six-point plan, must be respected.

The situation in the Middle East cannot be separated from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains a key issue. We welcome the renewed peace talks between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, and commend Secretary Kerry for his commitment. It is extremely important that the peace process provide tangible results, while respecting the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination as well as Israel's right to exist within safe and secure borders. But time is short. The continuing settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are an obstacle to peace and may well make a two-State solution impossible. The international community, including the

Security Council, must address the situation and do its utmost to prevent ongoing violations of human rights and humanitarian law on the ground. That includes addressing the continuing settlement activities, which are not confined to the construction of new homes for settlers but also include new roads and infrastructure as well as demolitions and eviction orders.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that this time the negotiations must result in two States, living side by side in peace and security. That is the only way forward for both parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Azerbaijan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this timely open debate on the Middle East.

On repeated occasions, the Holy See has clearly voiced urgent concern for the peace and welfare of all the peoples of the Middle East. On this occasion, my delegation once more joins its voice to those of all people of goodwill who stand ready to welcome with great hope the re-engagement of Israelis and Palestinians in direct, serious and concrete negotiations. Our hopes are renewed that we are witnessing at present a newly rejuvenated peace process.

This is a critical time for the region, and there are many issues to be considered. A solution for each and for all of the peoples of the Middle East must be characterized, first and foremost, by respecting the centrality and dignity of the human person, regardless of race or creed, by a concern for every human life and for human dignity and by the tireless pursuit of the common good for the whole of society, while also keeping in mind the regional and international context. The recognition and respect of the inalienable dignity of every human being is the road map to the unity and stability of every nation.

Peacebuilding between the people of Israel and the people of Palestine constitutes a lingering remnant of the twentieth century, which proved to be the bloodiest of centuries. Each side in the drama suffered grave humanitarian crises, whether in declared wars, extremist violence or the military responses thereto. In many of the confrontations, sadly, it has been the civilian population that has fallen victim to declared and undeclared violence. The impact of the

humanitarian suffering of both parties as a result of this ongoing conflict requires the international community every year to donate more funds to sustain refugee populations. The global economic picture, however, warns us that the situation cannot be sustained indefinitely. A political solution is also the best solution to those economic pressures, because peace between the parties generates stable economies and, in turn, attracts development funds.

My delegation wishes to note that other unresolved political issues have introduced yet further instability into the region. Accordingly, we join our voice to those expressing grave concern regarding the situation in Syria, and encourage everyone involved to continue moving forward in a sincere quest for justice and peace. As an imperative first step, the Holy See earnestly and urgently calls upon all parties to put an immediate end to violence and to begin a real process of dialogue with the "Geneva II" conference, planned for next month.

One of the consequences of the current violence in Syria is the flight of non-combatants from their homes. Added to the plight of over 4 million internally displaced persons within the borders of Syria itself, more than 2 million refugees, three quarters of them women and children, have already sought refuge in neighbouring countries and are now seeking peace, security and safety in countries outside the Middle East.

The challenges faced, especially by neighbouring countries, in assisting and protecting those refugees could have a destabilizing impact on the entire region. The situation is extremely grave and is worsening by the day; many people are dying of hunger or from a lack of access to basic and necessary medical care. The Catholic Church remains committed and active at the forefront in providing humanitarian assistance to people regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation, with all the means at our disposal. In that regard, I would like to recall that, on 1 September, Pope Francis called for a day of prayer and fasting for world peace, and particularly for peace in Syria.

From the beginning, the Middle East has been the cradle of the ancestral faith of Christians, and Christians have lived peaceably in those countries for centuries, indeed millennia. As citizens of their respective countries in the Middle East, they desire to contribute to their societies in the Middle East and to continue to be part of the social, political, cultural and religious landscape of the region and work for the common good of societies to which they fully belong, striving for

peace and reconciliation and guided by those values that can help society progress towards greater respect for justice, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For that reason, my delegation wishes in this Chamber to raise the issue of the worrying exodus of Christians from the region of their birth. Extremist and reactionary forces introduced into the region as a result of political instability and conflicts are targeting Christians and other groups that are suffering from the consequences of their blind violence. Christians see themselves forced to flee for the sake of life and limb, leaving behind a 2,000 year-old tradition bound up in the culture of the region. It is an unacceptable recurrence of what happened in Iraq when sectarian violence reduced the Christian population by 70 per cent.

For those of us here at the United Nations, the challenges of the Middle East to which I have referred are a clarion call to the task of peacemaking, which is the very reason for the existence of the Organization. By mustering the needed political will, the international community can make a difference in the life of the peoples of the Middle East and help them fulfil their long-deferred dream of peace in the Middle East.

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

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I will be making a shorter statement while the full text is circulated.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement to be made by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysia welcomes the resumption of direct talks between both sides and wishes to underline our support for the State of Palestine in its negotiations towards a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We also welcome the efforts of the other stakeholders involved in that important process, including United States Secretary of State John Kerry, the Middle East Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. Malaysia has always believed in a two-State solution, based on the borders

of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. We urge all parties to demonstrate honesty and sincerity towards achieving those objectives. Words must be followed up with actions to reflect the genuine desire for peace.

The commitment of the Palestinian side is clearly seen in the way the Palestinians have continued to foster an atmosphere conducive to the continuation of the talks. However, that commitment is not matched by those on the other side of the negotiating table. Our Palestinian brothers and sisters have shown tremendous courage and sacrifice as they proceed down the path of direct negotiations. They do so while knowing full well that they are backed by the overwhelming encouragement and support of Member States for their efforts to fully advance their interests within the United Nations and its organs, following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19.

Yet, despite that, Israel continues to announce the construction of new illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. Malaysia condemns Israel's building of illegal settlements in Palestinian lands, including in Jerusalem. Justice is long overdue for that violation, one that threatens to completely undermine the possibility of a just and lasting solution.

Malaysia furthermore reiterates its grave concern at the desecration by Israeli settlers of holy sites, including the recent attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Settler violence has also risen due to the olive season, with more Palestinian-owned groves and farms deliberately burned or robbed. Palestinian prisoners remain under long detention, in violation of international humanitarian law.

My delegation also demands an immediate end to Israel's blockade of Gaza, in particular in the light of the serious humanitarian situation and food security needs of the population. The people of Gaza are being denied their livelihood through collective punishment by the occupying Power that is both inhumane and illegal.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the occupying Power continues to act with impunity and to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the territory. My delegation reiterates our strong objections to Israel's pillaging and profiteering from the illegal exploitation of occupied territories, including the geological surveys recently concluded by a United States-Israeli company on oil deposits in the southern

half of the occupied Syrian Golan. Malaysia calls for the immediate and full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan, in line with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

Malaysia takes note of the recent discussions on the date and modalities of the conference to follow up on the 30 June 2012 meeting of the Action Group on Syria. My delegation expresses our continued support for the tireless efforts of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. In that regard, we call on all parties to come together and work towards a political solution that is Syrian-led and inclusive.

With regard to Lebanon, Malaysia reiterates that Israel must desist from its continued and almost daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty, whether by air, water or land. Israel must fully implement resolution 1701 (2006), which calls for the full cessation of hostilities and the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line.

In conclusion, while there are significant developments in the Middle East peace process, the Security Council is also currently witnessing other openings for peace in other areas of conflict. At the same time, voices of hate and ignorance continue to incite violence and oppression in the region. Malaysia continues to believe in a moderate approach to conflict resolution in order to bridge the differences and restore stability to the lives of Palestinians, Syrians and other peoples in the Middle East. We must collectively summon the political will to bring an end to the immediate suffering in those areas and commit to a moderate cause which could secure greater gains than if we were divided by conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): In their statements today, a number of delegations deliberately referred to the situation in my country in a misleading, provocative and distorting manner. They adduced a number of false allegations to serve their aim of supporting radicalism and terrorism in Syria and across the broader region and to detract attention from the core matter under discussion today: the situation in the Middle East. We remain firm in our conviction, reiterated time and again before the Council, that the objective for our discussion of this item should be to bring to an end the Israeli occupation

of Arab lands, not to discuss the internal situation of a certain State.

I will not respond to the statements made by enemy States that shelter, arm and train terrorists and facilitate their infiltration of Syrian territory across our borders with neighbouring States. They spread devastation, radical terrorism and Wahhabi extremism in Syria and seek, in particular, to bring about the failure of any peaceful solution under Syrian leadership. I mention in particular the regimes of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well as some well-known Western Governments whose conduct is in blatant violation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, in particular the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Israel occupies territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. The beginning of that occupation coincided with the birth of this international Organization. For more than half a century, successive Israeli Governments have perpetrated systematic and documented violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There has been more than half a century of settlement campaigns that undermine — as recognized by everyone, including Israel's supporters — the prospects for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and of peace and security in the region. There has been more than half a century of complete disregard by Israel for the relevant United Nations resolutions seeking to bring to an end its occupation of Arab territories. There has been more than half a century by Israel of State terrorism, racist laws, desecration of Islamic and Christian holy sites, and the eviction of Palestinian citizens from their homes, including women and children. There has been more than half a century of blind support by influential States, both within and outside of the Security Council, for the continued Israeli policy of occupying Arab territories.

For more than half a century, part of our land has been occupied and Syrian citizens have been chafing under the yoke of Israeli occupation. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Syrian citizens continue to suffer. Their suffering has been overlooked once again by the Secretariat in its briefing today.

Israeli settlement campaigns continue in the occupied Syrian Golan, where Syrians are subjected to the most horrendous policies of racial discrimination,

detention and torture. They are deprived of their natural resources and of education meeting the Syrian national curriculum. They are also prevented from carrying their Syrian identity cards. If a Syrian citizen in the occupied Syrian Golan refuses to carry an Israeli identity card, he or she is prevented from entering an Israeli hospital if he or she falls sick. Syrian citizens in the Golan Heights are prevented from following the Syrian curriculum in their studies.

Those facts are well-documented, well-established and well-known to all present. Since all present claim to be against occupation and to seek its termination, why has the United Nations failed, in humanitarian, political, economic and moral terms, to fulfil its responsibility to bring Israel's occupation to an end? While it is true that the United Nations, including the Security Council, has succeeded in adopting hundreds of resolutions calling for the cessation of the Israeli occupation, what is frustrating is that none of those resolution has been implemented, including resolution 497 (1981), on terminating the occupation of the Syrian Golan. It is useful to recall here that all resolutions, as well as international law, have been elaborated to be applied. The Charter of the United Nations, as well as other international instruments, have been adopted to be respected. United Nations resolutions have been adopted to be implemented. Accordingly, we have learned, and in turn we teach young diplomats, to come to the Organization to perfect the art of diplomacy. We try to convince them that the resolutions of this international Organization must be respected and carried out. That is supposed to take place seriously and applied to everybody without exception. I do not believe that any of the States Members that have acceded to the Organization for noble goals have come just to adopt resolutions that remain dead letters, or merely to cite those resolutions and laws in their statements or have them apply to some and not to others in accordance with so-called double standard policies.

I should like to ask, given that, after so many years, the United Nations has been unable to end the Israeli occupation of our occupied territory and return the rights of its people, what, in the Council's view, is the alternative? How can we regain our occupied territory in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and South Lebanon? We believe that what is needed today to preserve the credibility of the international Organization is for some very well-known States to end their policies of double standards. Member States should match words with deeds by taking concrete measures that force Israel to

abide by United Nations resolutions in a manner that will help to end the occupation and the unprecedented bloody tragedy being experienced by Arab citizens and Palestinians living under occupation for so many decades.

It is paradoxical that Israel was established by a resolution of the Organization (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). Regardless of our views on that resolution, Israel, which is indebted to the Organization for that resolution, currently, does not carry out any of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations when it comes to ending its occupation of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian land. Israeli occupation forces provide assistance to terrorist groups in the buffer zone in the occupied Syrian Golan by transferring injured terrorists through the separation wall to Israeli hospitals to be treated. It then returns them to Syrian territory, again through the separation wall, to continue their terrorist activities in that critical region.

We should pay due attention to ensuring that such Israeli assistance to terrorists does not constitute a flagrant violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) or international law — or that it endanger the lives of UNDOF personnel and undermine the work of the forces. That is precisely what has happened many times: terrorist groups have abducted UNDOF peacekeepers, targeted their positions and fired on them. We have informed the Department for Peacekeeping Operations of all the full details of such events, including the very serious matter concerning a Qatari intelligence conspiracy and the abduction to Jordan of a Filipino peacekeeping battalion. We requested an independent official investigation in a statement I made at the General Assembly on behalf of my Government, which I have reiterated in a number of statements at the Security Council. Strangely, months later, we continue to await a response from DPKO. To date, we have received no reply, either from the Secretariat or from DPKO. However, as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. That Qatari-Israeli collusion with Wahabi/Takfiri radical terrorists, who wreak havoc along the separation line in the Golan, is indicative of the policy of double standards and its collusion against the safety and stability of Syria and its people, as well as that of United Nations personnel.

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

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan): The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations currently under way sharpen our collective hope that in a few months' time a comprehensive peace will finally settle on a land most holy to the three monotheistic faiths — a peace founded on the basis of two States, Palestine and Israel, existing side-by-side in peace and security. As the two sides work their way towards that noble objective, with the extraordinary support provided by the United States Secretary of State, traditional spoilers will attempt, with increasing fever and intensity, to bring ruin upon us, in other words, to spoil that.

We urge the Israeli Government in particular to do everything in its power to prevent the extreme parts of the right-wing settler movement from provoking a crisis on Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We know the Israeli Government has the power to do so — it cannot say it does not — and the stakes are so high. Should it fail to take preventive measures, not only could those groups torpedo the talks, but they could also unleash a colossal, overwhelming global crisis on a scale hitherto not witnessed this century.

Similarly, we demand that the Israeli Government desist from demarcating, expropriating, confiscating, approving, announcing and undertaking any sort of settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in East Jerusalem. Not only could those actions ultimately undermine the talks but, obviously, they remain illegal under international law.

As we have noted previously in the Council, the position of the International Court of Justice on that last point is unambiguous, as explained in paragraph 78 of its 2004 advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273). Indeed, in earlier paragraphs of the opinion, in relation to East Jerusalem the Court also recalled specifically the position of the Security Council. The Court noted that resolution 298 (1971) states in paragraph 75 that

“all legislative and administrative actions taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem, including expropriation of land and properties, transfer of populations and legislation aimed at the incorporation of the occupied section, are totally invalid and cannot change that status”.

(spoke in Arabic)

Having just referred to the fundamental question in the region, I must now turn to the bloodier and more grave tragedy in the world, that is, the Syrian crisis. I would like to reiterate what was stated by His Majesty

King Abdullah II in his statement before the General Assembly recently (see A/68/PV.5), that the escalation of violence in Syria and the use of religious and ethnic divisions may undermine a regional renaissance and endanger international security. In order to confront such issues, we have to move quickly to initiate the process of political transition in Syria, to put a stop to violence and bloodshed, to end the refugee crisis and its disastrous effects on the neighbouring or host States, to eliminate chemical weapons, to try the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity and to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria. There is no need to re-emphasize the grave economic crisis experienced by Jordan, which has worsened as a result of acting as host to huge numbers of Syrian refugees.

My delegation gave a detailed account of the Jordanian crisis, providing statistics and numbers, in a closed meeting of the Council to discuss the situation on 30 April (see S/PV.6957). We submitted a request to the Council to visit Jordan in order for members to have first-hand experience of the real situation and its disastrous impact on our national security and economy. We were most hopeful that the international positive consequences of such a visit might have helped to alleviate the suffering and economic misery caused by the crisis. Unfortunately, after the passage of 176 days, Jordan has still not received any response to that official request, nor has it received any compensation for the grave material losses it has sustained.

I would like to emphasize that the Jordanian people are not in a position to bear this grave burden without sufficient international assistance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moreno Zapata (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. We also appreciate the briefing and report by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman.

The situation of conflict on the ground in the Middle East has not changed. The reiteration of statements that most States have made during the debate convened by the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, cannot be viewed merely as words. It is about a renewal of momentum and the maintaining of pressure by the international

community in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. The Security Council has adopted many resolutions on the issue of Palestine since 1947, and Israel has fulfilled none of them.

The impunity with which the occupying Power acts, flouting the resolutions adopted by this body, strip from it any credible authority or morality to judge anyone. Its criminal record of assassinations, torture, disappearances, apartheid, arbitrary detentions, among other crimes against the Palestinian people, continues to horrify the world.

Notwithstanding any negotiations that may be taking place, we have to realize the need for a positive atmosphere, and for such an atmosphere it is vital to stop the settlements policy of the occupying Power, Israel. That is an indispensable prerequisite for holding any kind of conversation. Moreover, the situation clearly shows a waning in the power of mediation that is exacerbated, not only by the use of the veto to block the application of sanctions against the occupying Power, Israel, but also by the fact that the mediation is being conducted by a partner of the Government of Israel.

Acts of aggression by settlers against the Palestinian population and segregationist controls and roadblocks and illegal settlements are ongoing. They sabotage the peace process, negotiations and violate the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention. Venezuela reiterates to the Council that there is a need to address the situation using the purview granted to this body by the Charter of the United Nations. And we fervently endorse a Palestinian State that is independent, viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The State of Palestine has shown that it is committed to participating in negotiations in good faith, but the ongoing Israeli aggression against its sovereignty and territorial integrity and the ongoing threat to the viability of the two-State solution make peace impossible in the region. The constant provocations and attacks, such as those that occurred at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and against Palestinian cemeteries, churches and mosques, are all elements that lead to the deterioration of the negotiations. The announcement by the Government of Israel to move forward with a settlement plan on Palestinian territory that includes 3,000 illegal settlements constitutes an act of aggression that places them on the margins of international law before the international community. Such war crimes,

acts of State terrorism and systematic violations of human rights committed against Palestinians must be tried in international tribunals.

Israel's frequent violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and its occupation of the Golan are also a source of great concern. It is deplorable that, rather than encouraging peace and supporting efforts to achieve a space of dialogue, as is claimed for the "Geneva II" conference, some countries — acting from outside — are instigating the more extremist and terrorist factions in Syria to continue the violence. Only political dialogue and diplomatic negotiations can contribute to solving the conflict that is affecting the Syrian people.

The warmongers do not want peace in Syria. They seek to bolster their geopolitical interests through regime change. They aim to destroy Syria and create a new political map in the Middle East. That is empowering terrorist groups like Jubhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qaida, which represent opposition forces linked to atrocities, including the destruction of the Twin Towers in this very city, an event that shook the entire world. Financing or encouraging such groups, which deny the existence of anyone who thinks differently from them, be they Christian, Muslim or Jew, and which promote hatred and the suppression of women, is a crime against humanity and compromises world peace.

In that regard, the Venezuelan Government regrets and deplores the terrorist acts recently committed in the suburbs of Damascus in which 30 people died at the hands of the groups I have just mentioned.

Venezuela encourages a negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria and commends the Government of Syria for its initiative in joining the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

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

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. We welcome this opportunity to continue to engage the Council on matters of international peace and security.

Our appreciation also goes to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Feltman, for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

It has become a tradition for the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This is in an effort to engage the international community and to share ideas on how we can work together to contribute to peace and prosperity in the Middle East. My delegation continues to follow with great interest the socioeconomic and political events in the Middle East, especially events in Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

On the situation in Syria, my delegation would like to express its continued support for the people of Syria and to call for an end to the horrible humanitarian catastrophe besetting the heroic people of that country. We are particularly concerned about the plight of millions of women and children who have been displaced and are without food, shelter and medical care. As we speak, some 6.8 million Syrians require urgent medical assistance, and 4.2 million remain internally displaced. We are told that of the 1.7 million Syrian refugees scattered and stranded in neighbouring countries, 50 per cent are children. It is disheartening for a people who have lived in their ancestral land from time immemorial to be forced into refugee camps on foreign soil. We call on the international community as well as humanitarian organizations the world over to respond with kindness and care to the refugees of Syria.

While we welcome the recently adopted resolution 2118 (2013), which calls on Syria to eliminate and hand over its chemical weapons to the United Nations, we would have preferred to have seen stronger language clearly stipulating the measures to be taken in the case of failure by the Al-Assad regime. However, we remind the international community not to be blinded by the resolution, but to remain vigilant and resolute to ensure that those responsible for the many atrocities in Syria, including the 21 August massacre, account for their deeds.

My delegation wishes to reiterate its position, which is in line with that of more than 60 other countries, to refer the Syrian question to the International Criminal Court. It is our firm belief that atrocities such as those of 21 August defy humankind and human nature. Those who played a part in the planning, organization and execution of those crimes should be investigated and tried by an international court of last resort.

On the question of the Palestine, Botswana continues to believe that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. The coexistence of Israel and Palestine,

living side by side as two sovereign States, cannot be overemphasized. That will not only be of value to the Israeli and Palestinian people, but will contribute to regional stability and offer new opportunities for the region as a whole.

My delegation is therefore encouraged by the resumption, in July, of the long-overdue talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We believe that the talks present an opportunity that should not be squandered. The Israelis and the Palestinians should, at the same time, prove their will and desire to shape their destiny and future.

We also commend all those who continue to be committed to the peace process, the representatives of the Quartet and the Security Council for their relentless efforts towards seeing a peaceful end to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It is my delegation's belief that these efforts should be augmented by both regional and international support. We further call on the parties to create an environment of mutual trust throughout the negotiations in an effort to safeguard the integrity of the negotiations, lest they be undermined.

In conclusion, Botswana believes that a stable and peaceful Middle East will not only usher in prosperity for the people of the region as a whole but will allow them to play a pivotal role in the development of their region and the world at large.

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

Mr. Ben Sliman (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to express our warmest congratulations on Azerbaijan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. Let me also express my gratitude for the convening of today's open debate on the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" — a new opportunity to consider the latest developments in the region, particularly those pertaining to the question of Palestine. Allow me also to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the subject this morning.

In my country's opinion, the question of Palestine is one of the core issues in the Middle East, particularly in the light of the latest developments in the region, the grave challenges entailed and the need to find urgent solutions. We therefore believe that this issue must remain central on the United Nations agenda as

well as on those of all its bodies. The issue requires the continuing effective attention by all Member States until a final, just settlement is achieved. Undoubtedly, that will be one of the fundamental keys to stability and comprehensive peace in the region.

In that context, it is our belief that there is no alternative but peace in order to achieve stability and to open new horizons for the peoples of the entire region. My country expresses its support and encouragement for the resumption of direct talks between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, under the aegis of the United States of America. We thank the United States for its efforts. We look forward to the talks culminating in a comprehensive final settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Such an outcome should include a clear and well-defined timetable that enables the Palestinian people to regain the right to establish their independent sovereign State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, thereby allowing peaceful coexistence among all parties in the region on the basis of durable peace and security.

The Council has before it today a historic opportunity to provide conditions for a just, balanced and durable solution that allows all parties an opportunity that cannot be squandered, particularly in the light of the current situation in the Middle East, which cannot afford further setbacks. However, most regrettably, what we see on the ground are the practices and policies by the occupying forces. We see unconstructive statements by its officials that do not reflect awareness or the necessary seriousness to achieve the desired peace. We believe that to be a serious threat to the current negotiations and a settlement between the two sides.

In that context, Tunisia condemns the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory — including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and surrounding areas — which, as indicated in the latest report by Peace Now, the Israeli peace organization, increased by 70 per cent in the first half of 2013, as compared with the same period last year. My country calls on the international community to act urgently to put an end to such practices, which the international community agrees are a flagrant breach of the norms of international law, resolutions of international legitimacy and the fundamental framework for a peace process.

Tunisia also condemns the attacks by the occupying forces and Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their properties, the confiscation of their lands and farms, and

the harassment, humiliation and violation of their most fundamental rights, including the rights of detainees and prisoners. Those, in the opinion of the international community, are a clear challenge to the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.

My country strongly condemns the attempts to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, to eradicate its Islamic sites and to change its demographic and geographic character, in addition to the daily campaigns of attacks against Muslim and Christian shrines, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian faithful therein. We call for the stifling embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2007 to be fully lifted in order to put an end to its serious and tragic economic repercussions, under which Palestinian citizens, including women and children, are deprived of the simplest and most basic elements of decent living. We also call for an end to Israel's occupation of Lebanese and Syrian territories.

My delegation would like to express its deep concern concerning the situation in Syria and the continuing acts of killing, destruction and terror in all parts of the country. That has the potential for grave consequences for Syria and its future, and indeed the entire region, particularly on the humanitarian level.

Tunisia reiterates its support for the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity and democracy. We also stress the need to step up efforts to achieve a political settlement to the crisis, which has become unbearable. We also emphasize the importance of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the cohesiveness of its society. In that regard, my country supports the current efforts towards the holding of the "Geneva II" conference to achieve a political settlement that is agreed upon and supported by all Syrian parties that desire peace. Such a settlement should put an end to the more than two years of strife that has had tragic consequences for Syria and the countries of the region.

We also reiterate our strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. We believe that to be a criminal act against the Syrian people — indeed, against humanity. In that regard, we very much appreciate both the United States-Russian agreement and resolution 2118 (2013), on the destruction of Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. Those weapons are indeed a threat to the peace, security and stability of the region and to international peace and security. We hope that development will be a positive step towards a political settlement of the Syrian crisis and the holding, at the earliest possible date, of

an international conference on a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

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

Mr. Kydyrov (Kyrgyzstan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

Let me begin by congratulating the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on recently having been awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. That timely and important recognition is testimony to the significant work being carried out by that organization around the world, especially in the Syrian Arab Republic during the past several weeks. In that context, we would like to express our full support for the decision taken by the Security Council on 11 October whereby a first-of-its-kind OPCW-United Nations Joint Mission in Syria was endorsed and entrusted with a multiphase mission to carry out resolution 2118 (2013).

The ongoing armed conflict in Syria is of the utmost concern to each and every one of us. The attempts by the international community to resolve the conflict and restore stability in that country remain insufficient. Kyrgyzstan once again expresses its serious concern over the numerous victims of the armed conflict, the humanitarian catastrophe and the further escalation of the crisis. We call on both sides to immediately implement a ceasefire and to resolve the crisis peacefully by conducting a dialogue among all the political forces of the country under the mediation of the United Nations.

We support the recent agreement on Syria's chemical weapons reached between United States and Russia, and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council. We welcome Syria's adherence to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. Kyrgyzstan is strongly convinced that more efforts should be undertaken by all the parties concerned to resolve the crisis while preserving Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, without military interference from the outside.

The need to avoid external interference, especially by force, unauthorized by the Security Council and to engage in political dialogue on the basis of the Geneva

communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), has been expressed in the declarations of the Heads of States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) adopted, respectively, during recent high-level summits in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and Sochi, Russian Federation. The member States of the SCO and CSTO voiced their support for the convening of the second international Geneva conference to lay a foundation for Syria's reconciliation and normalization.

The situation in and around Syria should not distract our attention from the Israeli-Palestinian question. We wholeheartedly welcome the resumption, in late July, of direct talks between Israel and Palestine. Those United States-brokered peace talks are of significant importance for both parties. As United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry rightly told the Council on 17 September (see S/PV.7032), momentous and sustained efforts will be necessary to successfully conclude negotiations within the nine-month deadline set for achieving a comprehensive settlement.

We consider it important to continue that process in order to find ways to achieve a long-term settlement and to reach an agreement that provides for the coexistence of two States living in peace and security in accordance with previously defined and accepted parameters. We support the efforts being made by the United States in that regard, including the series of high-level negotiations carried out by the United States President and the Secretary of State with their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts in September. At the same time, we express serious concern about continued illegal actions by Israel, such as the killing of innocent Palestinians, its settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the hampering of aid deliveries to those in need, the ill-treatment of prisoners, forced evictions and the excessive use of force.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our strong conviction that the Middle East Quartet, which has a strong mandate of trust from the whole international community, should play a more active role in the peace process to help both parties reach a final and comprehensive settlement.

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

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me begin by joining other representatives in thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. Our appreciation also

goes to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

My delegation also associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This meeting is being held at a time of continuing uncertainty, but also of hope. As long as conflicts in the Middle East remain unresolved, we must be hopeful and determined to achieve a resolution.

For Indonesia, the question of Palestine has always been one of tremendous importance. We remain deeply committed to supporting the cause of sovereignty that Palestinians have pursued for over 60 years, and to achieving peace.

We believe that last July's resumption of direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel is an encouraging development. It is our fervent hope that the negotiation will lead both parties to the common goal of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, we recall the meeting of the Quartet held in New York on 27 September, during which it was briefed on the progress in the negotiations. The Quartet appreciated the efforts of Palestine and Israel and was determined to lend effective support to both parties to reach a permanent status agreement within the agreed goal of nine months. The Quartet also called on all parties to promote conditions conducive to the success of the negotiations and to refrain from actions that undermine trust. Indonesia fully supports the position of the Quartet and calls on Israel in particular to maintain conditions conducive to fruitful negotiations. History shows that that is the fate that has befallen some previous attempts at successful engagement.

We would like to draw particular attention to the continuing construction of settlements and the separation wall, which present formidable obstacles to progress. Similarly, we condemn the continuing violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, including the prolonged detention of thousands of Palestinians, the eviction of families from their residences and the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has worsened the deplorable humanitarian conditions of the population.

We furthermore note Israel's recent cancellation of the visit of a UNESCO team to the Old City of

Jerusalem — the purpose of which was to examine the condition of several religious heritage sites in the city — in utter disregard of the principle of good faith in international relations.

Indonesia has continuously expressed its unwavering support of the two-State solution, based on the conviction that it is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to have their own State. Furthermore, the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with rights and responsibilities equal to those of other States, will contribute to the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Indonesia therefore takes this opportunity to renew its call on the Security Council to take steps to compel Israel to stop its illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, and to treat Palestine as an equal and respectable partner in the negotiations. We remain convinced that peace on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, constitutes an important element of any deal that may be achieved as the outcome of negotiations.

I would like now to turn to the issue of Syria. Indonesia remains deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict in Syria, and its impact on the Syrian people. The deaths of thousands of people and the widespread destruction of property necessitates that all parties immediately cease acts of violence and hostilities. It is also paramount that all parties to the conflict uphold international human rights and humanitarian law and ensure unfettered and safe humanitarian access for those in need.

Indonesia is of the view that Syria's favourable response to the safeguarding and eventual destruction of its chemical weapons, as called for in resolution 2118 (2013), while constituting an important step forward, also presents an opportunity for renewed efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Accordingly, Indonesia again urges the international community to deepen its commitment to promoting an inclusive political process that reflects the wishes of all Syrians.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to commend you on presiding over the Security Council.

Bolivia is once again addressing the Council to vigorously condemn Israel's continued military

occupation of Palestinian territory, which is perpetrated through violations of international law, the commission of crimes against humanity and violations of United Nations resolutions.

The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia believes that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Palestinian people has an absolute right to free self-determination. In that context, we urge the Secretary-General and the Security Council, in accordance with the mandates set out in the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to endeavour to achieve a just, lasting and peaceful solution in order to ensure a future of prosperity and progress, as called for by the General Assembly.

We reiterate our position that a permanent solution to the Palestinian question will be achieved only through ending the occupation begun in 1967, achieving an independent State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieving a just and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem based on the relevant General Assembly resolutions. We also call on Israel to comply with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

We cannot ignore the direct and indirect alarming consequences of Israel's closure policy in the West Bank and its abuses in the Gaza Strip. According to the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People of 7 October, (A/68/35), the restrictions imposed by Israel in the form of a blockade, on the movement of people and goods since 2007, have continued to undermine the living conditions of 1.7 million Palestinians.

The international community has the responsibility to ensure the relevant investigations regarding the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons and detention centres due to more than 2,951 arrest and detention operations carried out from 7 October 2012 to 6 October 2013. At least 3,583 Palestinians, including women and children, were arrested during that period alone. A UNICEF report published in March indicates that ill-treatment of Palestinian children held in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized.

We cannot fail to also mention that in August, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported that in the year 2012 Israel intensified its illegal settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in view of the fact that in 2012 the number of settlers in the 144 settlements in the West Bank was 563,546, representing an increase of 24,765 settlers as compared to 2011.

On 18 October, the President of the Council distributed a letter in which the Ambassador of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations expressed alarm about illegal Israeli activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which territory constitutes the State of Palestine. In that regard, my Government calls for the solidarity of the entire international community in view of the persistent provocations and acts of aggression carried out by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people. We especially condemn the attacks and abuses directed against the sanctity of Palestinian cemeteries, churches and mosques located in the occupied Palestinian territory, as such abuses can lead to serious consequences affecting the entire region and the broader international community.

I remember that, a few months ago, a Palestinian representative informed other representatives that there was no problem in adopting resolutions against Israel, because they would surely only collect dust in a file cabinet of the United Nations. We believe that it is crucial that the United Nations and the Council clearly signal that Israel's crimes cannot and should not go unpunished.

Bolivia is of course hopeful about the possibility of peace talks that may finally achieve the goals so longed for by the Palestinian people and the international community. However, we must not allow such discussions to become a delaying tactic to consolidate the crimes that have been committed against the Palestinian people.

Finally, with regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Bolivia naturally supports the problem being resolved in the context of negotiations, in full respect for international law and avoiding any unilateral action that violates it.

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

Mr. Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for having opened the door for an exchange of views on the situation in the Middle East, including, of course, the Palestinian question.

The question of Palestine continues to be a concern for nearly everyone. In spite of the recent resumption of dialogue and negotiations based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, the occupying Power has continued its abusive behaviour — a situation that serves to sow mistrust and instability with respect to the ongoing negotiation process.

The Israeli behaviour to which I refer leads to systematic practices prohibited by international law, including human rights law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations itself. More specifically, I refer here to the illegal occupation of territories, the unstoppable settlement activities, the blockade on the Gaza Strip, the construction of the separation wall, constant provocations, incitement to religious conflicts and clashes, the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians through military raids and the arrest of more Palestinians.

My country, Ecuador, considers it unfortunate to see how Israel carries out such practices of military control over another people. It is like so many other blemishes of the past, which we cannot, and should not, erase, for it is from our historical mistakes that we learn, and we have an ethical duty to not repeat them.

Based on that premise, it is worth asking: what is Israel seeking? We assume it is searching for a definitive solution to promote the peaceful coexistence of its State side by side with a Palestinian one, to restore justice, dignity and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to contribute to the long-awaited peace and security of the entire region. Or perhaps it is seeking to continue its unilateral and arbitrary policy that brings about unjust suffering and denies the rights of the Palestinian people, in flagrant violation of international law, in complete contradiction with common sense and to the detriment of the hope that the human species has for itself and for a future of peace and reconciliation.

I wish to reiterate the solidarity extended by Ecuador to the Palestinian State and people on 26 September during the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, with a view to

their just cause being realized through the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in an independent Palestinian State with its 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. At the same time, I wish to express our solidarity with the other countries of the region that are also suffering from Israeli military occupation, in complete disrespect for the rights of their peoples.

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

Sheikha Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and giving us an opportunity to speak. I also thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing this morning.

The Palestinian question is the central question in the Middle East and will remain a source of concern for the region and the international community until the just solution that is desired by all is found. To that end, the State of Qatar has expressed support for and welcomed the international initiatives to relaunch the peace process on the basis of the well-known terms of reference, which were confirmed by the Arab Peace Initiative and expressed at the recent summit in Doha. Arab countries have taken practical steps to achieve those goals.

We reaffirm today, as we have in the past, that the success of any initiative will be based on the sincere willingness of both parties to achieve the goals. We would refer to the unilateral settlement activities of the State of Israel, its efforts to change the demographic nature of the Palestinian territories, the Judaization of East Jerusalem and the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip. Those actions do not create the conditions necessary for the desired development and progress.

We urge the international community to find a solution that establishes an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders and a full withdrawal from all occupied territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied territories in Lebanon. The status quo jeopardizes any prospects for peace. Any decisions taken by the State of Israel are null and void under international law. Israel is responsible for the escalation of the crisis in the entire region.

We call upon the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities to preserve the city of Jerusalem and

the sacred Islamic and Christian monuments and sites there, to stop the aggression that religious people are subjected to in that sacred city and to take action to deter Israel in accordance with international law and the relevant Geneva Conventions.

The situation in Syria has reached catastrophic levels because of the violations by the Syrian regime, which even include the use of weapons of mass destruction against its own people. We recall the resolution issued by the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The Security Council reached an agreement on adopting a resolution on the use of chemical weapons. But the Council is also called on to take rapid and immediate action to protect civilians on the basis of its own mandate and the Charter of the United Nations.

On the humanitarian front, the Security Council, in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15), has taken the step of calling on the international community to take actions urgently, in a decisive manner, and to use all relevant mechanisms available to it. The human crisis faced by millions of Syrians and their children who are starving every day cannot be tolerated. The Council must adopt a resolution to put an end to their suffering.

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

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and would like to thank you, Sir, and the presidency of Azerbaijan for convening this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We all know the essential requirements for creating the necessary conditions for negotiations that lead to successful outcomes: political will, good faith and transparency. However, in the present case—the situation between Palestine and Israel—while negotiations have resumed between the parties and eight rounds of negotiations have been held, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to demonstrate its lack of political will, bad faith and lack of transparency. Indeed, it has intensified its policy of building settlements, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, its systematic violations of the most basic rights of the Palestinian people and the escalation of attacks in occupied East Jerusalem

against mosques and against the Palestinian people's right to freedom of religion and culture.

Nicaragua regrets the lack of progress since the most recent resumption of the peace negotiations, which demonstrates yet again that Israel's true intentions are directed not at achieving peace, but rather to imposing conditions for negotiations and buying time in order to permanently alter the demographic and religious composition of those territories, in a serious violation of international law.

We also take the opportunity this debate provides to reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian political prisoners who are being held in Israeli jails and are mistreated by the authorities, leading to hunger strikes and fatalities. We demand that the more than 5,000 Palestinians in prison be released immediately. We urge all those who defend human rights to join us in a global campaign of solidarity with Palestinian prisoners.

Year after year and month after month, we must continue to denounce and condemn Israel's illegal occupation and its expansionist policies, which, despite all the efforts to achieve peace, continue to hinder the process of negotiating for a political, peaceful and lasting solution. The anti-settlement organization Peace Now has issued a report that states that there has been a 70 per cent increase in the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including in occupied East Jerusalem. We ask the Council, is that consistent with the peace process and the ongoing negotiations?

Now more than ever, and after the approval by the vast majority of the international community of resolution 67/19, we are unavoidably committed to rectifying the historic injustice committed against this sister nation. Despite the fact that we have been unable to achieve such recognition — owing to a lack of political will on the part of one of the permanent members of the Security Council, which has blocked the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian cause with its veto and its threats — we, the international community, must continue to support all the initiatives of the Palestinian State, to persuade that permanent member to reconsider and rectify that injustice once and for all and finally achieve international peace and security in the Middle East.

Peace in the Middle East entails not only solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but must also necessarily include the situation in all the Arab territories occupied by Israel, particularly Syria and Lebanon. In addition,

Israel must immediately cease its attacks, practices and policies against the territorial integrity, sovereignty and self-determination of the Arab peoples and States of the Middle East. Peace should be achieved through dialogue and a political settlement. The negotiations between Palestine and Israel should continue in good faith and transparency. At the same time, the "Geneva II" conference is the only way to settle the Syrian conflict, with the participation of all the parties concerned.

In conclusion, we would like to call on the international community to declare 2014 an international year of solidarity with Palestine, which should culminate, finally, in the State of Palestine's admission as a full Member of the United Nations. Nicaragua reaffirms its absolute and total solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom and in the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to live in peace and freedom in their State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders, and with two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

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

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): Every now and then, we participate in open debates in the Security Council in order to revisit the story of the long suffering and denial of the Palestinian people. The Palestinians have been subjected to a regime of oppression without precedent anywhere on Earth. They have no security in their homes; their houses have been bulldozed, land confiscated, trees and crops destroyed, residents evicted, roads and neighbourhoods blocked and fragmented and borders walled. As a result of that systematic policy of oppression, the quality of life of the Palestinians throughout the occupied territories has diminished to subsistence level. Unfortunately, all of that is happening before the eyes of an international community that is committed to upholding human dignity and human rights as well as rights to self-determination and freedom from oppression and torture. It is happening because of the lack of any resolute action.

Despite a global outcry and an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice against it (see A/ES-10/273), Israel continues to build separation walls in the West Bank, dividing and isolating communities, destroying livelihoods and preventing

access to their jobs, families, markets, schools and hospitals for thousands. Appeals from the international community for improving the Palestinian people's ever-deteriorating living conditions go unheeded. We share the international community's concerns about Israel's continued pursuit of illegal, unethical and unfair policies and practices that impede the peace process and confidence-building.

When the stalled negotiations resumed this year, on 14 August, under United States mediation, we saw a ray of hope. As time progresses, that sense of optimism has started to fade as Israel continues to press ahead with its illegal settlement policies, which present the main stumbling block to progress. Twenty years after the breakthrough Oslo Accords, there is no sign of a final agreement that would ensure the creation of an independent State of Palestine, on pre-1967-ceasefire lines in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, living peacefully alongside the State of Israel.

Although the international community routinely restates its commitment to the concept of a two-State solution, Israel's construction of a barrier in and around the West Bank and the expansion of settlements on occupied land make that solution less feasible. Even the resumption of talks in August was preceded by the Israeli Government's announcement of the construction of some 2,000 new settler homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israeli settlement activities, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, Israeli military raids into Palestinian territories and extremist Israeli settlers' constant provocations to violence all exacerbate tension and reinforce doubts about Israel's commitment to a two-State solution.

It is undeniable that the root cause of the conflict is the occupation; it must end, and the sooner the better. The settlements are an existential threat to the viability of a future Palestinian State. It is contrary to international law and the road map, and therefore must cease. If peace in the Middle East is to be achieved, we must prevail on Israel to cease further illegal settlements, dismantle the existing ones in line with its obligations under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and tear down the walls — the sooner the better. In that context, we consider the recent action by the European Union to be a move in the right direction.

Although United States Secretary of State John Kerry has invested much political capital and time in convincing the two sides to resume talks, sustained

international pressure will be necessary to make Israel agree to a solution on the basis of the parameters rooted in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We also urge the United Nations to play its due role to resolve this protracted crisis. In particular, the Security Council cannot evade its own role, particularly since its resolutions adopted over time on the matter remain unimplemented.

Israelis have suffered in the past and they know more than anyone else that the aspirations of a nation cannot be denied forever. Even the mighty pharaohs could not stop those aspirations, and the creation of the State of Israel is proof that such aspirations can be fulfilled. Therefore, should we expect that the Israeli leadership will reflect on its own history and facilitate a two-State solution? I am hopeful, as we have seen positive outcomes in recent times — such as those in South Sudan and Timor-Leste. They achieved their sovereignty and independence and now live in peace and harmony as equal members of the global community. Let Israel and Palestine follow the same path.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has long been a major catalyst of instability and turmoil in the Middle East, fanning and fuelling violence and extremism in the region as well as the wider world. The Security Council has a responsibility, set forth in the United Nations Charter, to secure peace and stability by addressing the root causes of the prolonged conflict and negotiating a just solution to it. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh in the latest meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement's Committee on Palestine, on 26 September, reaffirmed our commitment to the realization of the inalienable and legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for an independent, viable, contiguous State of Palestine, based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and living side by side with Israel in peace and harmony. The realization of that goal would emend the historical injustice visited upon the Palestinians and greatly contribute to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

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

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): Norway welcomes resolution 2118 (2013) as an important milestone in the efforts to address the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. Removing the chemical stockpiles in Syria and eliminating the risk of anybody using those horrendous weapons in Syria ever again is timely and necessary.

However, we know that that turn of events will not end the war in Syria. Resolution 2118 (2013) should therefore be a stepping stone towards stopping the bloodshed in the country and finding a political solution to the conflict, for which there is no military solution.

Norway urges the parties to participate in the planned “Geneva II” conference. The conference should build on the framework already established under the first Geneva Conference. The goal must be to reach agreement on a transitional body that can prepare for free elections and a democratic constitution. Such a body could pave the way for a truly inclusive and democratic Syria and ensure respect for Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

At the same time, we must not forget the suffering of millions of victims and the urgency of full, immediate, unfettered and unimpeded humanitarian access. Today, more than 2 million people are without access to humanitarian assistance. That is unacceptable. We call on the Security Council to see to it that the presidential statement of 2 October (S/PRST/2013/15) is fully implemented.

Norway remains resolute in its support for the ongoing negotiations towards a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The courage shown by the top leadership on both sides is truly commendable. It is encouraging that the talks are continuing, as time is of the essence. We urge both parties to make use of the opportunity presented and to agree on a solution within the parameters of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo Accords and agreements signed later.

We of course understand that reaching an agreement involves painful concessions and tough decisions for both sides. But reaching agreement now is in the interests of the Palestinian people. This may be the last opportunity for a long time for the Palestinian people to realize their national aspirations. Reaching agreement now is also in the interests of Israel. Broader recognition of Israel’s right to exist can only be achieved by ending the occupation. Only the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State, in accordance with the principles of the two-State vision of peace, can provide the State of Israel with internationally recognized and secure borders.

Norway is concerned about any external events that threaten to undermine the talks. We condemn all use of violence. We call for restraint from unilateral

acts on the ground. Settlement activities must stop and all parties must refrain from provocations and stay the course.

Norway, in its capacity as Chair of the donor coordination group — the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians — calls on donors to follow up on the positive spirit in the meeting held in New York on 25 September. Additional contributions to the Palestinian Authority’s budget are urgently needed. The meeting concluded that \$350 million was required this year. It also called for additional support from generous Arab States to reduce the Palestinian domestic debt. The Palestinian Government is expected to further align its expenses to its resources. The Israeli Government is expected to lift restrictions to private sector development of the Palestinian economy. Both are expected to cooperate to further improve the business environment, trade, development, and the collection and transfer of taxes and duties.

With renewed hope for a political solution to the conflict, the donors agree to stay committed to the State-building programme while negotiations are ongoing. We, as donors, should now deliver on our promises. At the same time, the donors call on the parties to do their part.

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

Mr. Emvula (Namibia): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today’s very important debate, which affords the wider United Nations membership an opportunity to contribute to the very important deliberations on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Likewise, we thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the Middle East remains of great concern to Namibia, as the occupation of the Palestinian territories continues unabated and the people of Palestine continue to live under subjugation. Today’s debate is taking place at a time when Namibia is awaiting, with great anticipation, a positive outcome of the recently resumed direct negotiations between

the Palestinians and the Israelis, following intensive international efforts.

Over the years, Namibia has expressed its steadfast support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in the pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination, independence and freedom. It is a matter for which my delegation has persistently advocated ever since we obtained our independence from the South African apartheid regime, some 23 years ago; before that, we had been in the same boat as the Palestinians. We therefore cannot remain complacent while the people of Palestine continue to suffer under the Israeli occupation.

The people of Palestine have suffered and have lived under occupation for too long. The denial of their fundamental right to self-determination by the sustained Israeli occupation continues to seriously affect their socioeconomic wellbeing. They are not allowed to fully exercise their fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to which we all attach great value. Namibia is also opposed to the blockade of the Gaza Strip that has caused so much suffering to the Palestinian people.

Namibia wishes to reaffirm its call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and calls on the international community to facilitate the creation of the Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders. The international community has an obligation to ensure that the people of Palestine realize their inalienable right to self-determination and the creation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In this context, Namibia welcomes the reactivation of the Working Group of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with the mandate to foster and reinforce the Committee's cooperation with civil society organizations, and pledges to support the efforts of the Committee in mobilizing the international community to facilitate the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Real and lasting progress towards the freedom of Palestine can be realized only through the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the United Nations regarding the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

While we welcome the direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis following intensive international efforts, Namibia believes that peace in

the Middle East can only be achieved by addressing the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory by Israel. A great deal of work therefore lies ahead in clearing the path for the creation of the Palestinian State, ending the conflict, and bringing lasting peace and security to both Palestinians and Israelis.

Let me reiterate Namibia's strong support for the ongoing peace process. We appeal to both parties to commit themselves, to embrace this opportunity and to abide by their previous agreements and obligations to establish lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, with their peoples living side by side, within secure borders. Namibia is convinced that our deliberations here today will contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution — a solution that will bring an end to the Israeli occupation, which dates back to 1967, and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State.

Let me conclude by reiterating once more Namibia's unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their cause for freedom, independence and social justice, and our support for full membership for Palestine in the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

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

Ms. Muthukumarana (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers who have commended you for convening today's important debate. The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Finding a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East has been a priority for the international community since 1948. The Middle East conflict attracts a considerable amount of international attention and resources. We look forward to proactive leadership to end this unsatisfactory situation.

The conditions of the Palestinians must be improved urgently. This can only contribute to improving the situation of the region as a whole. Successive generations of Palestinians have suffered owing to a number of factors, in particular by being dispossessed from much of their land.

In recent years, the continuing blockade of Gaza has added to the pain and frustrations of Palestinians

living in the area. The blockade in Gaza has created an aid-dependent economy and given rise to a deep sense of helplessness. In 2012, its economy grew by 5.9 per cent, albeit from a low base, which was less than half the rate achieved in 2011. This has translated into very high unemployment rates and low wages, which, coupled with the increasing cost of living, have directly impacted on the Gazans' access to food. In 2012, 34 per cent of households, approximately 1.6 million people, were assessed to be food insecure. In addition, the continuing blockade continues to place a heavy burden on the already-stressed education system in the Gaza Strip. The recent closure of the illegal tunnels has put further pressures on the people of Gaza. There is an urgent humanitarian need to lift the restrictions on most imports, including essential supplies, and exports, through the legitimate crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

We note with concern that the United Nations is hard-pressed to keep the vast majority of the people of Gaza supplied with their minimum necessities. In the Gaza Strip, the funding difficulties of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have reached a critical point. Despite significantly scaling back humanitarian interventions since 2012, the Agency's emergency appeal remains severely underfunded. We underline our strong support for the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including UNRWA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The situation in the West Bank is also of serious concern. Although the number of search and arrest operations in recent months has remained stable, disturbingly the intensity of confrontations during these operations and the number of resulting civilian casualties has increased.

Israel has an obligation to protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. The settlement activity is a violation of the law as reflected in article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 1949. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice have all condemned the settlement activities as being contrary to the law. Ending such practices, which contribute to much human suffering and the continuing friction in the occupied

territories, is an essential step to improve the situation on the ground and to build confidence.

We are very much mindful of the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will only widen the gap between the parties. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the peace process and the safety of civilians. In addition, a climate conducive to peace would be encouraged by a mutual adoption of an approach sensitive to each other's concerns.

Considering the unsatisfactory circumstances in the occupied Palestinian territories, we hope that every effort will be made to achieve success in the resumed negotiations so that both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples will be able to enjoy peace and prosperity in their own lands. The objective of the negotiations should be to secure a lasting peace accord which leads to the establishment of a fully sovereign and secure State of Palestine.

Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the resolutions of the General Assembly regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people will contribute to the viability of that solution. We therefore sincerely encourage political rapprochement between Gaza and the West Bank.

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

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me at the outset, Sir, congratulate you sincerely on your accession this month to the presidency of the Security Council for the second time. I thank you for the crucial role you are playing in the Security Council and for having convened this debate on the situation in the Middle East.

My country fully endorses the statement to be made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as those already made on behalf of the League of Arab States and the Non-Aligned Movement.

For more than six decades now, the Council has been seized of the tragedy of the Palestinian people. Israel continues its violations of international law by denying Palestinians their rights, and the Palestinians continue to suffer. There can be no solution to the conflict so long as the resolutions of the United Nations affirming

the rights of the Palestinian people to establish their own State remain unimplemented. That has a negative impact on the Middle East region as well as on peace and security around the world.

It also allows Israel to pursue its policy of colonization, to hold thousands of prisoners and to violate the sacred nature of the holy sites. It also continues to displace Palestinian citizens, particularly in Jerusalem, and to implement its policy of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. All this is taking place before the very eyes of the Security Council, which has failed to shoulder its responsibilities and putting an end to Israeli occupation, which may well be the only one to outlive the era of racial segregation.

The Israeli occupation continues, as do the daily violations of Palestinian rights, including displacements, expulsions, arbitrary arrests, abuse of prisoners and ongoing settlement activities seeking to change the demographic situation on the ground by confiscating and destroying the houses of Palestinians, expanding the settlements, detaining and mistreating Palestinian demonstrators. Moreover, the blockade of Gaza continues.

The United Nations and the international community have repeatedly denounced those arbitrary practices, including last month (see S/PV.7032) when the Council was briefed by Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who reported on the aggression that cost the lives of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including an officer at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in the course of an act of aggression perpetrated by Israel. There have been 282 Israeli infiltration operations, according to the United Nations, and Israel has displaced some 176 Palestinians, including 87 children without any explicit condemnation from the Council. Israel is accelerating the pace of its aggression against holy sites through almost daily violations perpetrated by Israeli settlers. Nor should we forget the serious decision taken by the commanding general of the occupying authorities to give the Jews access to the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the attempt to build a synagogue in front of the Al-Marwani Mosque in order to Judaize that holy site.

It is time for the Council to renounce its policy of *laissez-faire*. It needs to be more effective in addressing the Palestinian question. It is high time for the Council to realize that the ongoing Israeli occupation constitutes and has constituted through the decades

an ongoing threat to international peace and security. My country, which was the first sponsor of the Arab Peace Initiative, calls on the Council to honour its commitments and to shoulder its historic humanitarian and other responsibilities so that the world may not lose hope for peace and its confidence in our common international institutions.

In Syria, the Syrian regime continues its campaign of extermination against the Syrian people, using every kind of conventional and non-conventional weapon and killing more than 120,000 people and displacing more than a quarter of the population of Syria. It has even used chemical weapons against defenseless civilians and continues to calmly proceed in such a manner that the Council will be unable to counter its violations or protect its citizens, which is a responsibility of the Syrian regime itself, due to the repeated use of the veto.

The Council responded tardily and minimally to the massacre at Ghouta, when the Syrian regime killed more than 1,000 people using chemical weapons. The response focused exclusively on chemical weapons and minimized the cause of a people fighting for its liberty to the sole issue of chemical weapons. Even when the Security Council has discussed how to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need, it has limited itself to adopting a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/15).

The Council must be firm. It must adopt the necessary resolutions that open the possibility of imposing sanctions against anyone who would attempt to carry out unprecedented moral blackmail by denying critical humanitarian assistance to certain provinces and cities. It is high time for the Security Council to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people by not allowing the Syrian regime to exploit the Council's resolutions on the convening of conferences or the elimination of chemical weapons as a delaying tactic. If the Council does not take the requisite measures, it could risk making the situation in Syria a perennial issue on which the Council will have to meet month after month, year after year, while Syrians continue to die.

My delegation affirms the need to resolve the situation in Syria immediately and definitively, without limiting itself to considering the repercussions of the Ghouta massacre and the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons, as was affirmed at the ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States in September. Necessary measures also need to be taken to achieve

a ceasefire throughout Syrian territory by prohibiting the use of military air assets, including missiles and heavy weapons, and to adopt a ceasefire monitoring mechanism under United Nations supervision.

Neither the Syrians nor the world will be able to forget the indifference shown by the international community in its failure to settle the Syrian crisis in a radical and effective way. We reaffirm that the Syrian regime and the forces that have plotted with it against the Syrian people by poisoning them with chemical weapons should not have a place in determining their future. They need to be brought to justice. A special tribunal needs to hold them accountable for the crimes they have perpetrated, and all those who have soiled their hands with the blood of innocents should be brought to trial.

To conclude, we remind the Council of the responsibilities incumbent upon its members for ensuring the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the establishment of zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. I recall that the Council failed in its duty to convene a special international conference to that end in 2012. This year is drawing to a close without there a glimmer of hope that it will be convened. This will lead peace-loving people of the region to question the validity of international resolutions if the international community is incapable of implementing through its institutions the most straightforward decision to convene a conference on which everyone is agreed.

We urge the members of the Council to renew and to restore the confidence of people around the world in institutions associated with international joint actions headed by the Council. Members need to remain committed to safeguarding international peace and security in a resolute and timely manner.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): South Africa joins others in congratulating you, Mr President, and your country on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. We thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing to the Council earlier today. We welcome the opportunity to participate and share our views in this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Recent events, in particular the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine, have been encouraging. We welcome the efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry in meeting with the leadership of both countries, and the current diplomatic efforts in Europe and the Middle East aimed at promoting peace in the region in general and a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum in particular. We hope that all those involved in the negotiations will find wisdom in the Arab proverb: “Be not so soft as to be squeezed dry, nor so stiff as to be broken”.

We believe that the only way a solution to that protracted conflict can be found is through a peaceful and fair negotiation process carried out in an environment conducive to fruitful deliberations — that is, an environment free of intimidation, fear, violence and other obstructionist activities.

We all know that the construction of settlements by Israel remains the biggest obstacle to progress in the peace talks. But Israel continues its settlement activities with impunity. We all know that the continued settlement construction changes the geographical make-up of Palestine and could make impossible the creation of two States, in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully alongside Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We condemn the settlement construction activities and call on those with the wherewithal to make them stop, including the Council, to do the necessary without delay. We know too well if it were not Israel that was engaging in those illegal activities, quick condemnation and threats of the use of force would have ensued.

Recent positive developments have yet to translate into progress on the ground, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory. The reality is that the Palestinians continue to live under an occupation that they have endured for decades. They face daily hardships compounded by many checkpoints that restrict their movement and access. The violence meted out by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians continues unabated, and the separation wall continues to be extended in spite of international condemnation. While we welcome Israel’s decision to free some Palestinian prisoners

as a confidence-building measure and a gesture of its commitment to the peace talks, at the same time we condemn the capture and imprisonment of Palestinian citizens, especially children.

South Africa is also deeply concerned about the plight of the Palestinians illegally imprisoned in Israeli jails and continue to live in horrendous conditions. We once again call on Israel to respect the human rights of all Palestinian prisoners and to abide by relevant international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949).

We reiterate our deep concern about the abuse of human rights of Palestinian children and their detention. We are all very aware of the long-lasting adverse effects that this will have on that vulnerable group and its negative effect on their potential to becoming responsible and productive adults. Again, we call on Israel to fulfil its obligation under international human rights and international law and protect the rights of children.

South Africa welcomes the reconciliation efforts among the Palestinians, including agreements reached between Fatah, Hamas and other parties in Cairo in 2011, as well as the agreement reached in February 2012 in Qatar. Those are most welcome developments. South Africa congratulated and encouraged all the parties involved in both these agreements to seek reconciliation and unity as an important ingredient for long-lasting and sustainable peace. South Africa will continue to support all efforts towards democracy, peace, stability and the advancement of human rights and human dignity in Palestine.

The development of the Palestinian Economic Initiative by the United States and the Quartet is commendable. We hope that it will be able to revive the economic potential of Palestine and help alleviate the current financial pressures the country is facing. We call on the international community, including the private sector, to lend a hand to this critical socioeconomic programme. The measures enacted by the Israeli Government to ease the implementation of the Initiative, including “approval for the importation of greater quantities of construction material and water into Gaza”, are welcome. Those measures would contribute to the revival of the enclave that has suffered a great deal under the blockade, which continues to frustrate the lives of the inhabitants of Gaza, and has

contributed directly to the increase in unemployment and poverty.

Despite those positive developments, we still call on Israel to end the illegal blockade of Gaza in respect of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980), 681 (1990), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009).

The need to deliberately link development and peace with security has never been as clear as it is today. The former Secretary-General Kofi Annan was right when he stated that

“we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all those causes are advanced, none will succeed.” (A/59/2005, para. 17)

Finally, we look forward to the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to be held on 29 November with the Palestinian *Arab Idol* winner, Mohammed Assaf, as the key feature of the celebrations. We wish the Palestinians all the best in their quest for self-determination and pledge our support for the noble cause.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In our national capacity, we would like to make a few comments about the important topic that we are considering today.

The Middle East has occupied the attention of the international community, in particular due to the events that have taken place in that region recently. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that the region has been marked by instability and insecurity, driven primarily by what we consider to be the main political problem in the Middle East — the systematic aggression of Israel, the occupying Power, against Palestine. The illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the main obstacle to peace and the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the region of the Middle East.

The Security Council must play its due role in maintaining international peace and security and adopt practical, specific measures to compel Israel to end to its abuse against the Palestinian people. Israel’s conduct deliberately violates United Nations resolutions,

threatens regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people. There will be no peace in the Middle East as long as that aggression continues and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are not taken into account.

The General Assembly took an historic decision when its member States, in a majority decision (resolution 67/19), granted Palestine observer status in the United Nations. Cuba supported that decision in line with its historic position of support for the cause of the Palestinian people in defence of their rights. The Cuban delegation reiterates its support for the admission of Palestine as a full-fledged State Member of the United Nations. The Security Council must consider and approve without further delay the request for its recognition as a State Member of the United Nations, presented by Palestine in 2011.

We are encouraged by the news of the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine, but we must continue to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Cuba demands that Israel comply with international law and end its occupation of all Arab territories, and reiterates its position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all of the peoples in the Middle East.

The Palestinian people's suffering has worsened under the growing number of Israeli settlements, the difficult and agonizing reality of Palestinian prisoners, and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the besieged Gaza Strip. The living conditions of its inhabitants have further declined under the ongoing unjust blockade of that area. Only the end of the settlement policy, the release of Palestinian prisoners and the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip will make it possible to implement a significant political process that would bring peace to the region. Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their just struggle for self-determination.

Cuba pays particular attention to the situation in Syria and its international repercussions. Cuba condemns any use of chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and is firmly committed to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, and to strict compliance with its provisions. Cuba supports the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass

destruction, including chemical weapons, in the Middle East.

In that context, we welcome the decision of the Syrian Arab Republic to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and its willingness to implement it immediately on a provisional basis, including before the entry into force of the Convention for that country. Likewise, we welcome the agreements achieved on the destruction of Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons. We also support efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict that respects the sovereignty, independence and integrity of Syria and the self-determination of its people.

We flatly reject military intervention as a solution to the very serious conflict, and we are opposed to the use of force against Syria. We share the concern over the loss of innocent lives in Syria and in any part of the world. We also condemn all acts of violence in that country against civilians and innocents. We reject the resort to the supposed protection of human lives as a pretext for foreign intervention, be it direct or through the support of illegal armed groups, including the use of mercenaries that only sow destruction and escalate the number of deaths.

The Security Council's obligation is to foster peace, not violence. It is to avoid destabilization and not to contribute to the financing, arming and training of those who aim to destabilize. It is to protect innocent people and not to use or manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole. Cuba is opposed to the calls of those who promote regime change in Syria and opt for the use of force and violence, instead of contributing to dialogue and to negotiation between all the parties. We also reject the complicity of the mass media, which are accustomed to distorting reality and are not accountable for the consequences of their actions.

We reiterate our call to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and the right to the self-determination of its people, without foreign intervention or interference of any kind, and we urge the promotion of a political solution to the conflict through diplomatic means without any more bloodshed.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I take the floor on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

While a period of extraordinary challenges is still evolving in the Middle East, a credible peace process towards a two-State solution remains a core priority of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We reaffirm the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until all of its aspects are justly and fully resolved, and we further reiterate our call for the international community's sustained engagement and full support, at this critical period, in seizing the current diplomatic opportunity to bring about tangible results that enforce United Nations resolutions and put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands occupied since 1967.

The latest United States initiative to reignite the peace process, spearheaded by Secretary of State John Kerry, deserves our commendation, and we hope that this time around it will produce realistic progress.

The agony, hardship and hopelessness of the Syrian people continue unabated. The brutality experienced by the civilian population is unparalleled, with millions in makeshift refugee camps in the neighbouring countries. There is no end in sight to that humanitarian catastrophe. All hopes are pinned on the renewed push for the long-delayed "Geneva II" conference and a negotiated settlement to end the mayhem and bloodshed.

The OIC expresses grave concern over the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and their land. Israel, the occupying Power, persists with its construction of illegal settlements and the apartheid annexation wall, which constitute grave breaches of international law, undermine the contiguity, unity and viability of the State of Palestine, and jeopardize the prospects for achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. In that regard, the OIC urgently calls upon the international community, particularly the Security Council, to uphold its responsibilities and further consider practical measures to bring an end to Israel's settlement policy.

The fragile situation on the ground due to the repeated provocative acts of violence and terror perpetrated by fanatical Israeli settlers is alarming. Such daily aggressions against Palestinian life, property and rights, which include blocking roads, vandalizing cars and houses, burning mosques and fields, and uprooting trees, along with other damage to property, have regrettably become commonplace. Such acts threaten to further destabilize the extremely fragile situation on the ground, and to sabotage resumed bilateral negotiations. The continued failure to enforce

international law has emboldened the occupying Power and the fanatical Israeli settlers to continue committing violations and crimes against the Palestinian people with impunity.

By the same token, illegal, unilateral Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem continue to endanger the precious significance of the holy city of Jerusalem for the entire Islamic world. All acts aimed at altering the Arab character and demographic composition of occupied East Jerusalem — including building settlements, excavating underneath Al-Aqsa Mosque, desecrating Islamic and Christian sites, distorting the authentic history of the city, changing its landmarks, demolishing Palestinian homes and closing Palestinian institutions with a view to isolating occupied East Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings — are illegal, null and void and must be brought to an immediate halt. The continuation of such illegal acts threatens to further destabilize the entire region.

The continued, intensified provocations of Israel, the occupying Power, and its extremist settlers, particularly at Al-Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, have the potential to inflame already simmering religious tensions and violence and must receive immediate attention from the international community, with due regard for measures to de-escalate tensions, to preserve the sanctity of Muslim and Christian holy sites in the city and to protect them from any acts of aggression and provocation.

In that regard, we recall that such illegal Israeli acts have always contravened international law and resolutions of international legitimacy, including those that affirm that East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, and that its illegal annexation by Israel continues to be rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

United Nations statistics show that the rate of demolition of residential and other structures rose last year and this in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The number of small communities being continuously leveled amounts to the forcible transfer of their population, which can no longer live there without shelter. That is a clear violation of the Geneva Convention and a war crime.

The OIC stresses that the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip constitutes a collective punishment of the Palestinian population, with serious and catastrophic

social, economic and humanitarian consequences on the lives of that entire population. The OIC reiterates its firm demand for an immediate end to that illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade.

Furthermore, the OIC is very concerned over human rights violations against Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. The inhumane policies and systematic violations perpetrated by Israel against Palestinian prisoners require the urgent intervention of the international community in order to defend the human rights of Palestinian prisoners, save their lives and pressure Israel to respect its obligations towards them, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions. Israel has administratively detained thousands of Palestinians for prolonged periods without informing them of the charges against them and without the right to due process.

The OIC believes that international consensus to bring about a just and comprehensive solution in the Middle East conflict requires the enforcement of international law and the implementation of international resolutions. The Security Council cannot remain silent while a volatile and dangerous situation continues to escalate on the ground due to Israeli persistence in defying the will of the international community through its forced occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and by denying the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The OIC calls upon the Council to play its role *vis-à-vis* the Middle East peace process by implementing the resolutions it has adopted, in an effort to move the process forward towards the realization of peace.

To conclude, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their rights to return, self-determination, sovereignty and independence in the State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel, who has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): Today, representatives from a variety of Arab and other countries have used this forum to launch a range of baseless accusations against my country, referring to our eternal capital Jerusalem. It is truly absurd to hear some of the world's most

oppressive tyrannies lecture the Middle East's only true democracy about human rights and religious rights. One has to wonder what rights those representatives might be referring to. Perhaps they mean religious rights like the Saudi policy of executing individuals who import Christian literature, or perhaps they are referring to the Saudi policy of banning non-Muslims from entering entire cities.

In his remarks earlier, the Lebanese representative accused Israel of violating resolution 1701 (2006). In fact, in the past two months, violation of the Blue Line and resolution 1701 (2006) from the Lebanese side have increased daily. Instead of standing guard, the Lebanese Armed Forces are standing by and permitting violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and the Blue Line by armed Hizbullah activists and armed Lebanese citizens.

Both sides — and that includes Lebanon — must respect resolution 1701 (2006). Lebanon's words are not enough. Perhaps Lebanon should consider toning down its rhetoric and turning up the heat on Hizbullah. As we speak, Hizbullah has built an arsenal of 60,000 rockets in populated areas south of the Litani River in Lebanon. By operating within civilian populations and directing a tax against the civilian population in Israel, Hizbullah and Lebanon are committing a double war crime.

In light of those and other human rights abuses, it takes a great deal of audacity on the part of the Lebanese representative to sit in the Chamber and demonize the only democracy that respects human rights in the Middle East. But I must say I was touched to hear the representative of Lebanon show such an interest in Palestinian rights, although I would suggest that, instead of issuing empty words, his Government should take a look at the Palestinian refugee camps throughout Lebanon where Palestinians are kept in some of the worst conditions in the region. They are subjected to violence, discrimination, economic oppression and marginalization from every sector of society.

I would like to also respond to certain other States in our vicinity that spoke against Israel earlier today. To begin with, there is no blockade in Gaza. All goods and humanitarian aid — let me repeat that, all humanitarian aid — enters Gaza from Israel. It does not take an expert in geography to know that Gaza has an additional entry point.

Furthermore, I wish I could be shocked by the accusations hurled by the Syrian representative earlier. But nothing can be more shocking than the crimes that

Syria has perpetrated, first and foremost the murder of 120,000 men, women and children; secondly, the use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians; and thirdly, the displacement of millions of people. The Syrian representative is using the oldest trick in the book. By attacking Israel, he is creating a smokescreen to distract from the atrocities being perpetrated in Syria by his Government. That trick has not worked in the past, and it is not working now.

Lastly, we have heard many representatives from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) group who have criticized Israel today. I would like to point out to those same representatives that they choose to ignore the crimes of the State that holds the chairmanship of NAM today, Iran, at their own peril. Iran is actively supporting a murderous regime in Damascus and responsible, at the same time, for killing thousands of Syrians, including Palestinian refugees. And it is that country that is leading all the attacks against Israel in this Chamber. The rhetorical hypocrisy of NAM must now cease.

The President: The representative of Syria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Adi (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor a second time. Once again, let me say that my delegation has repeatedly warned of the danger of being diverted from the substance of the item under consideration, the fundamental objective of which is the self-determination of Palestine and not the situation in neighbouring countries. I shall not fall into that trap.

However, let me point out the lies and half-truths that the representative of Israel has cited. The representative of Israel is speaking in the Security Council, which has adopted hundreds of resolutions calling for an end to Israeli occupation of Arab land. Is he trying to tell us about the steps Israel has taken to implement those resolutions, to end the plight of Arab peoples under Israeli occupation, and to end settlements?

Some delegations have indeed fallen into that trap and have spoken of the plight of the Syrian people, while forgetting the plight of Syrians under occupation in the Syrian Arab Golan. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic believes in the pivotal role of the United Nations. It believes in the role being played by the Council in maintaining international peace and security. Therefore we continue to call on the Council

to enforce all its resolutions relating to the occupation and to the fight against terrorism and those inciting terrorism.

The President: The Permanent Observer of Palestine asked for the floor to make a second statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I apologize for taking the floor again, but I find it extremely necessary to respond to the representative of Israel's barrage of lies presented to the Council regarding the Palestinian people and their leadership. I will not debase myself by responding to that barrage of lies. Suffice it to say that it is difficult to see those who have their forces and their settlers, some of whose leaders have their hands tainted with the blood of thousands of Palestinian victims, come and lecture us about morality and assuming the high ground.

In that regard, I also challenge the representative of Israel, who, in a sweeping manner, just said that the documentation that we send to members of the Security Council is nothing but lies. I challenge him to offer a single piece of evidence that the documentation that we regularly send to the Council in order to document the crimes of Israel, the occupying Power, against our people in the occupied territory, is not true. Let him offer a single piece of evidence. He just said that the contents of our letters are lies, but he does not cite a single piece of evidence to that effect.

With regard to Jerusalem, I think that Israeli action speaks for itself. He cannot assume that the people in this Chamber and the entire international community are just a bunch of fools. It is a known fact that millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are not allowed to come and practice their religious activities in holy Jerusalem, whether they are Muslims or Christians. Those are facts. Any Palestinian, for example from Ramallah, who tries to go to Jerusalem to pray on Friday at these holy places will not be allowed to practice his or her religion at those sites if he or she does not have a permit.

The speech that the Israeli representative gave is most surprising. It is not a speech that is congruent with the atmosphere of peace or that advances the contours of peace. It is the statement of someone who is really looking for excuses to create problems and to run away from the prerequisites of peace in terms of good behaviour congruent with international law.

The universal position of the entire international community and the statements that have been given

by everyone here today — and we are thankful to them — and of many others who have come from outside the Council send a loud message to the Israeli leadership that it must wake up from the dream in which it is indulging itself and refusing to acknowledge what is really happening. It must heed the international community and act according to the requirement of peace, and not try to blame others. It is a message from all participants here, which we appreciate, that the leaders of Israel need to wake up and to act according to the prerequisites of peace.

I believe that it is time for all of us to put an end to the unlimited impunity enjoyed by Israel and to apply the law to that country as it was applied to those who acted as they did until the Council acted decisively. When the

international community, and the Security Council in particular, act decisively, they will not allow someone to come and lecture all of us as the Israeli representative just has. We are confident that the Council's patience is running out, and we are very close to the point where either they act in good faith, negotiate with us in good faith, act in accordance with international law and stop all the crimes and violations of international law being committed against our people, or — I am sure — the Council will take action against them in a decisive manner in order to allow peace to take root.

The President: 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 p.m.