

Mr. O'Brien (UNOCHA):

I would like to start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his insightful monthly briefings, which incorporate the humanitarian situation in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. The humanitarian needs continue to be far too high. Nearly every resident in the occupied Palestinian territory is recognized as being affected by the protection crisis. Poverty and unemployment have driven more than a quarter of all households to food insecurity. Half a million school children require humanitarian assistance to access quality education. And an estimated 1 million people are in need of humanitarian, health and nutrition interventions. Overall, nearly half of all Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories — some 2.3 million out of a total population of 4.8 million — are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. In Gaza, humanitarian needs stem from nearly 10 years of closures and restrictions imposed by Israel following the military takeover by Hamas, citing security concerns, and exacerbated by successive rounds of hostilities between Hamas and Israel, internal Palestinian political divisions and Egypt's near-complete closure of its border crossing with Gaza. These events have left half of Gaza's households food-insecure — twice the average rate across the occupied Palestinian territories — with only sporadic access to clean water and regular, reliable electricity. Seventy per cent of the Gaza population has running water — most of which is not drinkable — for only a few hours every two to four days, while energy deficits leave households with only six to eight hours of power daily. This lack of reliable power places lives **19/10/2016** The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question **S/PV.7792** 16-33267 **5/64** at risk in medical facilities already struggling with a lack of equipment, medicines and skilled staff, reduces the operation of wastewater facilities and undermines the key to breaking Gaza's aid dependency: revitalizing its economy. In all of this, Gaza's children have suffered the most. A 10-year-old child today has already experienced three rounds of conflict in her short life. Nearly 230,000 children continue to be in need of psychosocial support, and an estimated 250,000 children require mine-risk awareness owing to the prevalence of explosive remnants of war. Israeli children along the Gaza border have been impacted as well and continue to live in fear. While there has been an increase in the absolute number of exit permit approvals from Gaza since 2012, the acceptance rate for exit permits for medical treatment has reached a seven-year low; of the 2,394 applications made in August, only 60 per cent are approved, compared with some 76 per

cent, which was the monthly average in 2015. Humanitarian organizations provide food assistance to some 1 million people in Gaza each year, while donor-funded emergency fuel, distributed by the United Nations, is keeping critical water, sanitation and health facilities going uninterrupted. I welcome Israel's recent decision to sell an additional 10 million cubic metres of water to Gaza, but we must work towards a sustainable, long-term solution. It is critical that this happen quickly. The economic reality in Gaza is such that chronic humanitarian needs persist. Gaza's gross domestic product stands at approximately half that of the West Bank, and its unemployment rate is double, at 42 per cent and nearly 60 per cent for youth, one of the highest in the world. Movement and access restrictions on goods and people, albeit variable, not only literally bind most people to an untenable reality in Gaza, but also impede economic activity. More than 1,500 traders and 160 businesspeople in Gaza have lost travel permits in recent months, reversing the trend of increased permit approvals witnessed post-2014. Without the capacity to develop the local economy, a sustainable solution to the humanitarian needs in Gaza will not be possible. Rebuilding local housing and infrastructure is essential. International support and some relaxation of import restrictions by the Israeli authorities, including through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, have resulted in notable progress in repairing damage to houses, hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure, as well as allowing the highest import levels to Gaza since 2007. However, some 60,000 people remain displaced and have been reliant upon transitional shelter since 2014. Their living conditions raise a range of concerns, including protection risks and gender-based violence. A continued lack of funding to rebuild more than one third of completely destroyed houses leaves over 4,000 families without the prospect of a home in the near future. If humanitarian needs in Gaza are to decrease, we need development activity and economic recovery. We need tangible improvements to counter the rising tide of hopelessness sweeping Gaza's youth. It also stands to reason from our collective experiences that left unaddressed, this hopelessness of youth will drive more local insecurity and contribute to even more radicalization and exported insecurity. As stated in the Quartet report, the full lifting of the closures is crucial to lasting progress in Gaza, in line with international law and resolution 1860 (2009). The operating environment for humanitarian action in Gaza has also deteriorated. Access for humanitarian staff in Gaza, for example, has become increasingly problematic. The rate of permits denied to United Nations national personnel based in Gaza rose from 3 per cent in January

to 41 per cent in September. Low-level hostilities between Israeli security forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza persist, and concerns remain that insufficient measures have been taken to minimize civilian casualties; patently that is the case when rockets are fired from Gaza into urban settings within range across the border into southern Israel. Chronic concerns remain over the lack of accountability for alleged violations of international law by all parties. The Israeli authorities have opened 31 criminal investigations, but only one indictment has been issued, for a case of looting, out of more than 500 complaints relating to the conduct of hostilities during the 2014 escalation. No meaningful investigations have been announced by Palestinian authorities, and Hamas still holds two Israeli citizens and two bodies of soldiers. I call for their swift return. Turning to the West Bank, the past year has been the most deadly for Israelis and Palestinians since the end of the second intifada. I continue to be alarmed by Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians and by the numerous responses to such attacks or alleged attacks **S/PV.7792** The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question **19/10/2016 6/64** 16-33267 by Israeli forces, many of which have raised allegations about excessive use of force. Recent months have also marked an increase in the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces, in particular against Palestinian stone-throwers during confrontations. Prosecutions in such cases are rare. In addition, the bodies of 18 Palestinians are still being withheld by the Israeli authorities; I call on the Government of Israel to return them without delay as well. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, this year, the number of structures demolished was already 958 as of 13 October, 75 per cent higher than in all of 2015, with most demolished due to lack of permits. Demolition of donor-funded humanitarian assistance has also spiked, at 271, 150 per cent higher than last year, and there have been more demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem — 147 — than in any year since the United Nations began systematically recording such demolitions in 2008. Overall, 1,447 Palestinians have been displaced, including 719 women and 690 children, with another 5,919 affected, including 1,571 women and 1,763 children, owing to the demolition of livelihood structures. Such demolitions violate international law and must cease immediately; the Secretary-General has called on the Government of Israel to revoke policies and halt practices that may lead to the forcible transfer of Bedouin and herder communities. In February, I stood before the Council with a clear message: to give this issue the attention it deserves. We need collectively to reverse the core drivers of these humanitarian needs. We must move

towards decisive action that will reduce humanitarian needs, secure respect for international law and bring to Palestinians and Israelis alike the hope and reality of a stable, peaceful and prosperous future. I take this opportunity to briefly update the Council on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, in the context of the military operation to recapture Mosul, which commenced in the early hours of Monday morning. On the third day of operations, reports indicate that military activities remain concentrated in less-populated areas, with no large-scale civilian displacement recorded at this stage. As hostilities intensify and progress towards densely populated areas, I am extremely concerned for the safety of up to 1.5 million people living in the city. We believe that families in Mosul will be at great risk during the operation of getting caught in cross-fire or being directly targeted by snipers, as they forage for food. We are concerned that civilians may be used as human shields or forcibly expelled and become trapped between front lines. The elderly, the disabled and pregnant women may be unable to move to safety without assistance, and, based on past evidence, the so called Islamic State's practices caused the greatest concern for protection issues. Finally, nothing is more important than ensuring that civilians are protected and have access to the assistance to which they are entitled during the operation. As the crisis unfolds, I call on all parties involved to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. As humanitarians, even though we wish to see the worst case averted, we are obliged to plan for the worst. We anticipate a displacement wave of approximately 200,000 people over the coming weeks, with up to 1 million people displaced during the course of the operation in a worse-case scenario. Of these people, we anticipate that 700,000 will require shelter and emergency assistance. Thus far, shelter has been prepared for 60,000 people in camps and emergency sites, and preparation for sites for an additional 25,000 is accelerating. Emergency supplies are being prepositioned close to displacement sites. Mobile clinics and health and protection teams are prepared. Food trucks are on standby. As the winterization of displacement sites becomes a priority and temperatures drop over the coming weeks, needs are expected to rise. In short, as needs rise, so too must the international response.