

**Mr. Mminele (South Africa):**

We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to the United States for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. South Africa aligns itself with a statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Nevertheless, my delegation wishes to make remarks on six critical issues. First, South Africa is of the view that this quarterly debate should not stray from the core Israel-Palestine issue that has been on the Security Council's agenda for over 70 years. While several Security Council resolutions have been previously adopted — including most recently resolution 2334 (2016) last December, condemning the establishment of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory — the Council has failed to act decisively on the matter. It remains a stain on the Council's record.

Therefore, while there has been no progress on the matter in the Security Council, today's open debate, at the very least, should provide the wider United Nations Membership with an opportunity to express their views on the conflict. Secondly, on 3 April my Government issued a press statement through which it expressed its deep concern at Israeli plans to continue with its illegal settlements, in defiance of resolution 2334 (2016). That resolution affirmed that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law. We hold the view that this development by Israel will undermine the conditions for successful final status negotiations and for advancing the two-State solution through those negotiations.

Thirdly, we note with disbelief that 2017 will mark the fiftieth year of Israel's military conquest of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In his speech to the General Assembly in September (see A/71/PV.14), Palestinian President Mr Abbas urged the international community to exert greater effort than before to S/PV.7929 The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question establish a truly independent Palestinian State, and called on Israel to recognize the State of Palestine and put an end to its occupation, so that the State of Palestine can coexist alongside the state of Israel in peace and security as good neighbours. He said that in the context of the fiftieth anniversary this June of Israel's occupation. According to reports, during that period over 48,000 homes and related structures were demolished in West Bank and Gaza; 586,000 acres of Palestinian land confiscated, and 300,000 Palestinian refugees created.

On that score, South Africa remains committed to working with Israel and Palestine, and with the international community, to find a lasting and durable solution to the conflict within the parameters of international law. Fourthly, my delegation is of the view that it may also be useful to note in today's debate that, as there is increasing focus on a more effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) pertaining to women and peace and security, the reports from the Secretariat to the Council on the situation in the Middle East should also regularly include a specific focus on the impact of the conflict on women, who face specific challenges under the occupation. Fifthly, with regard to the central stance reflected in the concept note (S/2017/305, annex), the upsurge in acts of terrorism globally and in the Middle East reaffirms that terrorism continues to be a threat not only to international peace and security but also to fundamental rights and freedoms.

South Africa condemns in the strongest terms possible terrorist acts wherever they occur and by whomsoever they are committed. We support the approach that continues to place

the United Nations at the centre of multilateral efforts to counter terrorism. We remain firm in our belief that no country can address the challenging and complex threat on its own, and that terrorism will not and cannot be defeated by military means. Last but not least, we wish to highlight the plight of Palestinian prisoners, especially during this time when, according to reports, 1,100 of the 6,200 in eight prisons in Israel are on hunger strike, in protest over conditions in Israeli prisons.

They are calling for improved conditions, including regular family visits, improved medical care and an end to the practice of holding hundreds of detainees without charge. In conclusion, my delegation firmly believes that dialogue and negotiation remain the only way forward to finding a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate my delegation's commitment to continue working within the United Nations and other multilateral structures to seek ways of countering the threat posed to international peace and security by terrorist acts in an effective and efficient manner