

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland):

Allow me to thank the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for having organized this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including on Israel and Palestine.

The region of the Middle East is witnessing an unprecedented series of conflicts and crises, inflicting suffering on millions of civilians. The international community, led by the Council, is addressing those crises in all their urgency, from Syria to Libya and to Yemen. Iceland praises the countries in region that are hosting such a large number of refugees and is contributing new funds to assist countries in the region dealing with refugee crisis.

As has been observed, we live in an age when wars have no winners, only losers. Broad support has been expressed for highlighting prevention and political solutions in the conclusions of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/682) on their implementation. We urge the Security Council to refocus its preventative and political powers on the oldest conflict in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a primary example in which decisive action by the Security Council and the international community is needed to prevent further degeneration of the situation. The simmering nature of that conflict is in danger of moving to a boil. The spate of violent attacks against Israeli civilians continues, with the death of 30 innocent Israeli civilians in recent months. That is unacceptable, as is the targeting of any other innocent civilians. Of deep concern as well are the killings by Israeli security forces of a large number of Palestinians in relation to the spate of attacks, raising questions of due process and the excessive use of force. Israeli security forces have killed approximately 180 Palestinians since last September. Al-Haram Al-Sharif has remained quiet in recent months. We would encourage all parties involved to make sure that it continues to do so. Action to prevent further conflict is urgent.

First, it is urgent to defend the only clear course to sustainable peace, the two-State solution. Israel continues with illegal settlements, land appropriation and punitive demolitions, despite international condemnation. Those actions are in breach of international law. They also seriously threaten the viability of the two-State solution. Iceland urges the Security Council to go beyond the words of condemnation expressed by individual Council members and to take action as a body to send a clear signal to the Israeli authorities that settlements are unacceptable. If we are all as serious about the twoState solution as we say we are, the Security Council must defend it.

Secondly, the international community needs to do more to lend impetus to the search for peace. Iceland welcomes the launch by France of an international support group and the call for a peace conference. In the search for peace, we should not forget the huge potential that exists in involving women on all sides.

Thirdly, ways need to be found to re-establish trust among the parties. That is principally the responsibility of leaders on both sides, who need to be open to creative and innovative solutions. But the international community, led by the Security Council, should search for ways to bring a sense of hope and a horizon of security for the Palestinians and for Israel. That should include looking at measures to establish international protection.

Fourthly, the situation in Gaza needs to be normalized as part of a preventative approach. The firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel is totally unacceptable. The authorities on the ground are responsible for preventing such action. Israeli responses should be proportionate. But if Gaza is not to become a breeding ground for radicalization, then reconstruction must be accelerated and the Strip's isolation lifted.

Iceland condemns all acts of violence against civilians. We believe that the security Council must take firm action to safeguard the path to peace and the two-State solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also believe that broader international involvement is now necessary to break the impasse, and we welcome the French initiative.

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