

**Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (spoke in Spanish):**

Like my colleagues before me, I congratulate you, Madam President, on organizing this open debate, and thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his informative briefing. I again reiterate Uruguay's full support for his work. The Middle East remains the epicentre of numerous armed conflicts of extreme complexity, including sectarian and inter-faith elements. Participants in those conflicts include not only regional and other States, but also various non-State entities, such as militias and armed groups, that claim supposed religious affiliations based on intolerance and fundamentalism that violate the population's most basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have also witnessed the rapid growth of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, Jabhat Fath al-Sham — better known as the Al-Nusra Front — and Da'esh, all of which have exploited the institutional vacuum in various countries of the region. Such absence of State power in many cases stems from foreign military interventions that were not authorized by the Charter of the United Nations or by the Council and that in recent years have led to chaos and death for the civilian population.

Of course, this is not the only cause of terrorism, which also feeds on the deep religious, sectarian, ethnic and tribal divisions that have dominated the region for centuries, as well as the evolution of these societies, in which we sometimes see a lack of political freedom as well as the excessive repression that fuels radicalization. Nor can we overlook another evident reality that explains how these extremist groups have managed to survive, despite their savage acts and their total contempt for human life, as an ongoing presence in the contemporary history of the Middle East. This reality is the military, logistical, financial and political support of some States of the region as well as outside of the region, which use them as tools in order to pursue their own agendas and interests, as they do with the armed militias and groups that I have mentioned. Several of these groups, which try to hide behind the label of "moderate opposition", have perpetrated acts that are just as, or even more, reprehensible as those committed by the terrorists themselves, with whom they sometimes ally themselves, depending on the circumstances.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, owing to its duration and its spillover into the rest of the region, remains the most relevant of all of the situations that affect the Middle East. Uruguay reaffirms once again, as we have been doing since 1947, its unwavering support for the right of Israel and of Palestine to live in peace, within secure and recognized borders, in a framework of renewed cooperation and free of any threat or action that would breach that peace. Likewise, we reiterate our support for a solution involving two independent States, convinced that this is the only option that will allow the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine, and in this respect we call once again for the resumption of negotiations between the parties, which is a crucial step towards achieving that goal. To achieve that goal, we must reverse the current trends on the ground identified in the most recent report of the Quartet, failing which it will be difficult for Palestine to strengthen its State. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) was a clear sign of the importance that the international community attaches to the peaceful and successful conclusion of this process.

The announcements made in the past three months by Israel on the expansion of its settlement policy violates the provisions of that resolution and of resolution 242 (1967), which states that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible. These measures, as well as the recent episodes of violence and terrorist attacks, the incitation thereto and their glorification, do not help in the least to move towards peace together and also risk

endangering the possibility of a two-State solution. Uruguay welcomes all international initiatives that would allow us to move forward in the quest for solutions in the framework of the Middle East peace process, in order to achieve a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution, in accordance with international law, that takes into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties.

Throughout the open debates on the Middle East in which we have taken part, we have reiterated the vital need to protect civilians. Humanitarian assistance is critical in order to enable them to survive in the situations in which they find themselves; this is particularly crucial for the most vulnerable groups, such as women and children. Also particularly pressing are the situations in Yemen, Iraq and Libya, where we are seeing a combination of political, security, economic and S/PV.7929 The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question humanitarian crises, with the potential of giving rise to truly disastrous situations if we do not take action immediately. In Yemen, whose humanitarian crisis could become even worse than the one in Syria, is on the verge of famine, and the population continues to be the target of indiscriminate attacks against hospitals, schools and markets. Finally, I should like to mention once again the conflict in Syria, the worst crisis of our time and one that requires greater efforts in order for it to be resolved peacefully. Well into the twenty-first century, we are still seeing chemical attacks, sieges, famines, the use of civilians as human shields, brutal public executions, forced displacement of the population, attacks against schools and hospitals, the recruitment of minors as soldiers and the destruction of the historical and cultural heritage of humankind, all of this met with frustrating inaction on the part of the Security Council. We vigorously condemn the chemical attack that took place on 4 April in Khan Shaykun, and we trust that a complete, impartial and independent investigation can be carried out to identify those responsible for this war crime, so that its perpetrators can be brought to justice.

We call upon all actors in this conflict to remain calm and not take any unilateral action outside of the United Nations that could endanger the possibility of reaching a peaceful solution to the crisis and stability in the region. The most recent chapter in this string of horrors was written last Saturday, when, during the evacuation of Fo'ah and Kafraya, a brutal attack killed almost 130 people, half of them children. They were innocent civilians who, after suffering siege and hunger for many years, had hoped to begin a new life. In their memory and in that of the hundreds of thousands of people who have died in Syria and the millions of victims who have fled the conflicts in the Middle East, we reiterate that only a political negotiation can make it possible to reach the agreements necessary to ensure that, in the not-too-distant future, the region will no longer be synonymous with war, grief and devastation, but will gradually begin to see a more promising future.