



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8717th meeting

Tuesday, 11 February 2020, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Goffin (Belgium)

Members:

China	Mr. Zhang Jun
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mr. De Rivière
Germany	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia	Mr. Djani
Niger	Mr. Aougi
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
South Africa	Mr. Mabhongo
Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mrs. Craft
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

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 (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the President of the Observer State of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and I request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Observer State of Palestine, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: Let me start by welcoming His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine and the members of his delegation.

I address the Council today with a deep sense of concern as we witness growing tensions and instability around the globe, particularly in the Middle East. Tensions and risks in the Gulf have risen to troubling

levels. And after seeing some promising developments last year, today we are witnessing dangerous re-escalations of the conflicts in Yemen, Syria and even Libya. This volatile context only underscores the need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for far too long, and which remains crucial to sustainable peace in the Middle East.

I reiterate my full personal commitment and the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the parties in their efforts to achieve a two-State solution.

As I stated recently, the position of the United Nations in this regard has been defined throughout the years by resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, by which the Secretariat is bound.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in resolving the conflict on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements and realizing the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines.

This is a time for dialogue, for reconciliation and for reason. I urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate the will necessary to advance the goal of a just and lasting peace, which the international community must support.

Rest assured of the full commitment of the United Nations to a just and comprehensive peace between Palestinians and Israelis based on our shared multilateral framework, set by United Nations resolutions and international law.

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and my Personal Representative, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, is here to brief the Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: On 28 January, the United States presented its vision for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which it proposed as the basis for negotiations between the parties.

The Palestinian Government has rejected the proposal. The League of Arab States and the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation also released statements rejecting the proposal, saying that it did not meet the minimum rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The European Union High Representative said that the proposal departs from “internationally agreed parameters”. A number of African Union member States also rejected the proposal during their recent summit.

Meanwhile, senior figures in Israel’s Government have welcomed the proposal, saying that they would be willing to use it as the basis for direct negotiations. Some Member States have expressed their hope that the release of the vision would be an opportunity to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, in the interest of advancing a two-State solution.

The United Nations policy on the issue is defined by the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

In the days since the proposal was unveiled, we have, unfortunately, witnessed some sporadic violent incidents throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in and around Gaza. Further escalation or provocations would be a concerning development. They could complicate the situation on the ground and would serve only those who seek to radicalize people and undermine efforts to achieve peace. Today all must show restraint and clearly and unequivocally condemn violence whenever it occurs.

Following the release of the United States proposal, senior Israeli officials vowed to unilaterally annex large portions of the West Bank, including all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley. The United States has announced that it will establish a joint committee with Israel to produce a more detailed version of the conceptual maps included in the proposal, which would in turn allow it to recognize an Israeli decision to apply its laws in specified areas in the West Bank.

The Secretary-General has consistently spoken out against unilateral steps and plans for annexation. Such steps, including the possible annexation of territory in the West Bank or similar moves, would have a devastating impact on the prospects for a two-State solution. They would close the door to negotiations, have negative repercussions across the region and severely undermine opportunities for normalization and regional peace.

Just as unilateral steps will not resolve the conflict, those who reject the proposal should not turn to violence. That would be the worst possible response at this sensitive moment. Instead, what is needed today is political leadership and serious reflection on what needs to be done to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

I hope that the Council will join the Secretary-General’s call for a negotiated solution to the conflict and constructive engagement between the parties. The United Nations has long supported a two-State solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

Today, however, it is not enough to just reaffirm our positions. Today is the time to hear proposals on how to move the process forward and find our way back to a mutually agreed mediation framework that ensures that meaningful negotiations can restart.

While it is hard to envision a comprehensive agreement between the parties under the current circumstances, let me strongly underline that we must avoid continued entrenchment in the status quo. Continuing on the current trajectory, described in the 2016 Middle East Quartet report (see S/2016/595), would only push Palestinians and Israelis further apart, deepen the occupation and imperil the future viability of the two-State solution.

The United Nations remains deeply committed to working with Israelis and Palestinians and with our international and regional partners to realize the objective of a lasting and just peace.

As the Secretary-General has said, that goal can be achieved only through realizing the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

There is no other road to achieve this goal, except through negotiations. There is no other framework except the one that Israelis and Palestinians together agree on, a framework based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. In the absence of a credible path back to negotiations, we all face a heightened risk of violence — violence that will drag both peoples and the region into a spiral of escalation with no end in sight.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now call on President Abbas.

President Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): I have come to the Security Council on behalf of 13 million Palestinians to call for a just peace and nothing more. I have come here today to reaffirm the Palestinian position in rejection of the Israeli-United States deal. Our position is supported by the outcomes of meetings held by the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union, which all concluded that the deal must be rejected in totality, in addition to statements issued by the European Union, Russia, China, Japan and other countries around the world. I cite in particular the statements of the Secretary-General, who has reaffirmed the international terms of reference and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

The broad rejection of this deal is the result of its unilateral positions and the fact that it flagrantly violates international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. It annuls the legitimacy of the Palestinians' rights to self-determination, freedom and independence in their own State. It legitimizes illegality, settlements and the confiscation and annexation of Palestinian territories. I reaffirm that this deal or any part thereof cannot be considered an international reference for negotiations.

This deal is a proactive Israeli-United States arrangement with a view to liquidating the Palestinian question. We have rejected it because it removes East Jerusalem from Palestinian sovereignty. That alone is enough for us to reject it. This deal confines our people and homeland in residential fragmented areas and leaves them without any control over the land, air and sea. It would put an end to the Palestinian refugees. It would definitely eliminate all bases for the peace process. It is tantamount to a rejection of all signed agreements based on the establishment of two States along the 1967 borders. This deal will not bring peace or stability to the region, and therefore we will not accept it. We will confront its application on the ground.

I have before me a summary of the project that has been presented to us. The map shows the State that they would give us. It is like Swiss cheese. What Council member would accept such a State? This deal dictates its own terms and the entrenchment of occupation, annexation by military force and the strengthening of the obsolete apartheid regime that has now returned to Palestine. The deal rewards occupation instead of

holding Israel accountable for all the crimes perpetrated against our people and our land for decades.

In that regard, I would like to thank countries, regional and international organizations, parliaments and members of the Security Council for helping us defend the international consensus based on international legitimacy and relevant United Nations resolutions. We also thank Israelis — yes, Israelis — who have also rejected this deal in different ways, and those who stood with us in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States. We also thank American organizations and free people who have rejected this deal. We value their commitments and positions in support of peace and upholding international legitimacy.

Some 300 Israeli officers have rejected the deal in this document — 300 Israeli officers who have fought for their country and now confirm that they are fighting for what is just. We also welcome Israeli demonstrators who have taken to the streets of Tel Aviv to reject this deal. I have here a letter signed by 107 members of the United States Congress and another signed by 12 members of the United States Senate, including some presidential candidates. They all reject this deal.

We salute the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic peoples and all those who champion peace around the world and who have taken to the streets by the thousands and hundreds of thousands in the West Bank and in Gaza. Although it is freezing there, they are taking to the streets by the hundreds of thousands to say “no” to this deal. Some are saying that it is a just deal and that only Abu Mazen and two or three of his supporters are rejecting the deal, but it is not like that. Hundreds of thousands of people are taking to the streets to say “no” to this deal. Tens of thousands around the world are saying “no” to this deal.

Some people insist that this deal is a just one. It is not. I have come to the Security Council today to say that peace between the two Israeli and Palestinian peoples is still possible and achievable. I have come here to build an international partnership to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. We are still committed to that peace as a strategic choice. This deal is not an international partnership. It has come from one State, with the support of another, to be imposed on the world and on international legitimacy, which is represented by hundreds of United Nations resolutions and dozens of Security Council resolutions. We reject this deal.

I wonder why there is determination to draft this United States-Israeli plan alone, given that we have been engaged in dialogue with the United States Administration in 2017, and we have spoken about all the final-status issues. President Trump and I had a long discussion. We have spoken many times about international legitimacy and the vision of the two-State solution, and he agreed with me and said that he would announce that. We also talked about the 1967 borders, Jerusalem, security and other issues, which we discussed in Oslo. I was happy to discuss those issues with him at the time.

However, I was surprised afterwards when the office of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington, D.C., was closed, and they declared Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. How is that possible? He transferred his Embassy, and called on other countries around the world to do the same. Moreover, he stopped sending us aid, which amounted to \$840 million. He also stopped sending assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I do not know who gave him that abhorrent advice. I know that President Trump is not like that. The President Trump I have met is not like that. I do not know from where he got this behaviour.

I would like to recall before the Security Council that we held the Madrid Peace Conference, the Washington, D.C., negotiations, the Oslo Accord and the Annapolis Peace Conference, on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy that called for negotiations on all final-status issues, including Jerusalem. We should negotiate over Jerusalem. We cannot dictate that Jerusalem is to be given to the State of Israel. No, Jerusalem is occupied land. Who has the right to give it as a gift to one State or another? We are appealing before the Security Council today, which has the highest legitimacy in the world, and we are committed to all Council resolutions.

We also have been committed to implementing all agreements with Israel. We have behaved responsibly, which is why the world has respected us. Some 140 countries have recognized the State of Palestine. We have become a part of the international system. We became an Observer State in the General Assembly, although we were unable to become a full Member because of the veto. We have joined more than 120 international treaties and organizations. Last year the Observer State of Palestine became the Chair of the

Group of 77 and China, which includes 135 countries. We do therefore exist.

We have continued to build up our national institutions based on the rule of law and international parameters for a modern and democratic State that supports transparency, accountability and combating corruption. We are among the most important countries that are combating corruption. I call on the Security Council to send a fact-finding mission to Palestine to observe our efforts to combat corruption and to see that this emerging State, under the yoke of the occupation, is free from corruption. Anyone who claims that our State is corrupt has only to come and visit and see for themselves.

We have empowered women and youth. We have worked on spreading the culture of peace among our Palestinian people. We always call for peace. We reject wars, violence and terrorism, and we fight violence and terrorism around the world. We have signed 83 protocols with 83 countries to fight terrorism, and one of them is with the United States of America, as well as with Canada, Russia and Japan, among other countries. We are fighting terrorism. We are not terrorists, and we will remain committed to combating terrorism.

We have held elections three times. We believe in democracy. The last time that we called for elections Israel rejected our request. Why? Because we cannot hold elections in Jerusalem, although we held elections in 1996, 2005 and 2006 in Jerusalem. Now we cannot. A decision has now been taken that Jerusalem is united and is the capital of the State of Israel. However, that will not happen. East Jerusalem is ours, and West Jerusalem is theirs. Nothing can prevent cooperation between both States and both capitals.

Some say that we have wasted opportunities for peace. But that is not true. Abba Eban, the brilliant genius, said one day that Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. We never waste opportunities. Recently, some are repeating those words. Which opportunity have we have lost? Do not utter such stupid slogans. We have accepted all United Nations resolutions, from resolution 242 (1967) to resolution 2334 (2016), which amount to 87 resolutions. We became an active member of the international community. In 1993, we signed the Oslo Accord, with all its details and provisions. We recognized Israel and Israel recognized us. We recognized Israel in Oslo. Yasser Arafat said "I recognize the right of Israel to

exist". Yitzhak Rabin also said, and put it in writing, that he recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We have recognized one other. What opportunity for peace did we therefore waste?

We responded to the efforts of the United States Administration, international initiatives and all calls for dialogue and negotiations. However, we were never offered the bare minimum of justice in accordance with international legitimacy. The current Government of the Israeli occupation is undermining international efforts. We have seriously seized every opportunity because peace is in the interest of our people and the peoples around the world, and this document shows that.

Several countries, including Russia, Japan, Belgium and the Netherlands, invited us to hold a dialogue with Mr. Netanyahu on their territory. While we responded positively to each of those invitations, Mr. Netanyahu never did. I went to Moscow three times, and he did not make an appearance. Therefore, who is rejecting peace here?

I therefore cannot help but wonder about the opportunities we have wasted, as Abba Eban said and as others repeated. Successive occupying Israeli Governments and settlers have sought to destroy all chances for peace. They have accelerated their settlement activities and built settlements — with impunity — throughout the West Bank and all other territories occupied since 1967. They have changed the characteristics of the occupied city of Jerusalem and continued to attack Islamic and Christian holy sites, confiscate land and wage war and siege on our people in the Gaza Strip, armed, unfortunately, with the strong support of the United States Administration.

The United States has issued a number of decisions that violate international law and have not been accepted by the world and a large number of members of the current United States House of Representatives and many peace organizations, including American Jewish organizations. House of Representatives resolution 326 by rejects the policy of the President and the Secretary of State of the United States on settlements. That was a decision by the House of Representatives — we are not inventing facts or lying to anyone.

I also reiterate that we reject all attempts to link economic assistance to a political solution. They said there will be economic aid — forget about the political solution. They went to Bahrain and Warsaw and said that they will give us \$50 billion, without bothering with a

political solution. We reject that. The political solution must come first, and then, if the United States wishes to provide economic assistance, it will be most welcome. However, we cannot accept an economic solution before a political one. We thank all countries that are currently providing us with assistance — without preconditions — so that we can build our Palestinian institutions and an independent State.

At this difficult time, and before it is too late, I address President Donald Trump by saying that the proposed plan by the United States cannot achieve peace and security because it has abolished international legitimacy. Who can abolish international legitimacy? Who can abolish the international legitimacy of the highest platform in the world? President Donald Trump has managed to do so. The United States plan eliminated all the resolutions of the international legitimacy and denied the international legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, while placing East Jerusalem outside Palestinian sovereignty. This plan will not be applicable because it fails to meet the aspirations of the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, which would be sovereign and independent,

Believe me, if peace can be achieved between us and the Israeli people, it will be the best form of peace that nurtures the most beautiful relations between our two States, Palestine and Israel. But we need to be given an opportunity to achieve that peace. I know that the peace plan is 180 pages long, and that not everyone is willing to read it all. Therefore, we have decided to provide a 20-page summary that is easier to read, as it is unnecessary to read the remaining parts.

I hope that President Trump will be fair and just and support the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy in order to create an opportunity to achieve a genuine peace between the Palestinians and Israelis. An imposed peace will not work and cannot last. Let us achieve peace by working together, as we began to do in Oslo, without the interference of any other party — I repeat, without the interference of any other party — and even without the knowledge of any other country. I challenge anybody who says that he knew about it. We signed a transition agreement and were ready to uphold it for five years until a final solution was reached. But they killed Yitzhak Rabin. Why did they kill Rabin? May God rest his soul in peace.

From this Chamber, I call upon the Middle East Quartet, represented by the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations, including the members of the Security Council, to hold an international conference for peace in order to implement resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular resolution 2334 (2016). Yet I say all resolutions. Pick and choose any resolution and I am ready to accept and implement it. But no single resolution is implemented? Eighty-seven resolutions are not implemented. Where to go? If resolutions of the Security Council, the highest platform in the world, are not implemented, where to go? To whom shall I complain?

We call for the implementation of all Security Council resolutions, the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, which we stress as is part of international legitimacy, resolution 1515 (2003). We are not proposing anything new. An international mechanism must be established based on the international Quartet to sponsor negotiations between the two sides. Any other country could join the Quartet, but frankly, we cannot accept the United States as the sole mediator. We welcome it within the Quartet, but we will not accept it alone. We tried that once, and we cannot do it again.

I call on the entire international community to put pressure on the occupying Israeli Government to cease its occupation practices and its continuous decisions to annex our territories, or even territories under dispute over which Israel has no right to annex. It will destroy any chance for peace. At this historic time, I would like to again extend my hand towards achieving peace before we miss this last opportunity. I hope to find a genuine partner in Israel, like Mr. Rabin or any other person who believes in peace, in order to achieve genuine peace for current and future generations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and other peoples of the world. Let us live together.

Our Palestinian people can no longer tolerate the occupation of our country. The situation could implode at any moment. To prevent that, we need renewed hope. I ask the Council to not take that hope away from us — hope for our people and all other peoples of the region for freedom, independence and peace. There is hope that the free world will champion our rights, so do not take away our people's hope.

I would like to show a map to Council members. This map shows Palestine as it stood in 1917, 1937, 1947, 1948 and 2020. Each time I look at the map, my heart is torn apart. Is that what we deserve? Is that what the Palestinian people deserve? Why? At some point things were different for us. How did we arrive at these islands? On this occasion, I would like to address the Israeli people and tell them that the ongoing occupation, settlements and military control of another people will not help them achieve security and peace. We have only one choice. We must be partners and neighbours, each in our own independent and sovereign country. Let us remain committed to that just choice before it is too late.

I again stress that our conflict is not with the Jewish people. We are not against Jews; we are Muslims not against Jews. A Muslim who says that he is against a Jew commits blasphemy. If a Muslim says that he is against the Jews or the Torah is an infidel, not a Muslim. We are not against Jews. We are against anyone who attacks us, regardless of who he is and the religion he believes in. Our conflict is not with the Jews but with whoever occupies our land.

Therefore, we will continue our struggle, in which we have sacrificed thousands of martyrs, prisoners and wounded to end occupation and establish our Palestinian State, while stressing that our people will not surrender. Council members have seen that we will not surrender. We will continue to demand our rights. If we are allowed to enjoy our rights, we will be grateful to whoever grants them to us. However, we will never relinquish our rights or surrender to the occupation, regardless of the time we invest and the sacrifice we have to make.

In conclusion, I reiterate that I am ready to start negotiations. I have always been ready, so long as Israel shows itself to be a partner ready for peace and negotiations, under the auspices of the international Quartet and on the basis of internationally agreed parameters. I am serious. I stand ready to begin immediate negotiations here at the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy. I am ready to start those negotiations immediately. I will say one thing — we will not resort to violence and terrorism, regardless of how strong the aggression against us. We believe in peace. We believe in combating violence. We will therefore not resort to violence.

There are already 83 countries — soon to be 133. We are ready to cooperate with any country to combat

terrorism. We are against terrorism and violence in all their forms and manifestations. We will not resort to terrorism. We will fight using peaceful, popular resistance. One need only look at what is happening now in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets, braving the freezing cold to say “no” to the deal. It is not just I or my delegation rejecting the deal. All our people are saying “no, no, no” to the deal. Finally, I ask the world to be careful to not kill the hope of our Palestinian people. I have come for the sake of hope. Do not dash my hope.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Abbas for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): If President Abbas were truly serious about negotiating in good faith; if he were really interested in peace, he would not be here today. He would have taken the advice that he received from several members of the Council and from many Arab States and used this opportunity to start direct negotiations. If President Abbas were serious about negotiating, he would not be here in New York; he would be in Jerusalem.

In 1977, after the Yom Kippur War and countless clashes on the border, President Sadat of Egypt did not come to New York to speak at the United Nations. He went to Jerusalem to speak in the Knesset. President Sadat understood that to achieve peace, bold and brave steps must be taken and that a difficult history must be relegated to the past. President Sadat went to Jerusalem and spoke directly to the Israeli people about extending a hand for peace. I remember listening to that speech, as a child. The fact that the leader of a country against which we fought numerous wars spoke in the Knesset was incredible. All of Israel was glued to our screens, listening to his voice. Not long after the speech and that show of leadership and willingness to negotiate and compromise, Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat signed the historic peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

If President Abbas were serious about negotiating, he would not be here in New York; he would be in Washington, D.C. In 1994, His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan did not go to the United Nations to discuss the dispute with Israel. He went to Washington, D.C., and, together with Prime Minister Rabin and President Clinton he signed the Washington Declaration. Back

then, they agreed on the terms for negotiations and, only three months later, a historic peace treaty was signed between Israel and Jordan.

If President Abbas were serious about negotiations, he would not be here today. He would be in Jerusalem or in Washington, D.C., sitting down with his negotiating partner. But President Abbas is not serious about negotiations or about peace. Instead, he has done what he always does. He came here to distract us from his unwillingness to negotiate, sit down and talk. Members can ask him about the last time he met with our Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In the past decade, they have met only once. How many times has President Abbas come here to speak in the Security Council or the General Assembly? Why come all the way here? Why not drive to Jerusalem or have the Prime Minister drive to Ramallah? He is trying to blame the lack of progress towards peace on Israel, complaining instead of leading. That is not leadership. That was his way when he took office and that remains his way today in the sixteenth year of his four-year term.

President Abbas claims that he wants sovereignty for the Palestinian people, but has done everything to avoid receiving it. His words are nothing but lip service. His call for sovereignty long ago became a battle cry rather than an actual goal. It is a way to keep the conflict alive. As I mentioned, in the last decade not even one meeting has taken place. On the other hand, over 150 United Nations resolutions concerning the Palestinians have been adopted in that period. Does that seem like a reasonable balance if one is sincere about peace? To hold zero meetings with one’s negotiating partner while over 150 United Nations resolutions are adopted? It is only reasonable to someone who has no real intention of negotiating.

It must be noted that the rejectionism of President Abbas has been encouraged by many in the international community, if not through words then through actions. Voting in favour of one-sided resolutions only further encourages his behaviour. Many here have fallen into the habit of trying to force the outcome of negotiations before they have even begun, adopting preconditions that directly contradict previous agreements between the sides.

For example, Israel and the Palestinian Authority previously agreed, in internationally endorsed agreements, that a border would be determined only through direct and bilateral negotiations. Yet still,

some here, against that explicit agreement, try to either precondition that future borders must be negotiated based on the so-called 1967 lines. Let us negotiate. If he is told that will be the outcome, he will not enter the room. That is what we are doing here. Why should he negotiate with us when others are negotiating for him? Negotiation means entering the room with demands and negotiating. That is what we did with President Sadat and King Hussein, and, God willing, that is what we will do one day with the Palestinians. But that is what real negotiations are.

When President Abbas sees that his battles are being fought for him and there is no need for him to negotiate or agree to mutual compromises, it makes peace an ever more remote possibility. Meeting here once again to criticize Israel and the United States for their efforts to promote peace also does not increase the likelihood of President Abbas agreeing to negotiate. It would be best if the international community focused its efforts on bringing both sides to the negotiating table.

It is also time to reconsider the international community's approach to resolving this conflict. It is clear that something in the current approach is not working. President Abbas spreads lies in order to mislead the international community into believing that his desired solution to the conflict is the only solution. In fact, he did just that today. However, all previous attempts at peace have been based on the same principles and dogmas, and they have all failed. Albert Einstein once defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

President Trump's takes a sane approach to solving this conflict. It understands that we have to try something different. Maybe it will work this time. The basis of the plan is the idea of achieving just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. However, what this plan does differently is refuse to accept the same out-of-date concepts of previous peace plans. This plan refuses to accept that the only way to solve the conflict is with a formula that has failed for over 70 years. The plan represents the requirement of a realistic approach that is not afraid to incorporate innovative ideas to address the concerns of both parties. It represents the necessity of a pragmatic approach in order to solve a complex problem. Even if some are critical of the specifics of the plan — and I know many are — they should still embrace its spirit, which says that it is time to look for a new and pragmatic approach to resolving this conflict.

The plan's drafters themselves have said that the plan is only a suggestion — a tool for the sides to use in their negotiations. It is clear that some delegations are beginning to embrace the spirit of the plan. That is why they have used the opportunity presented by its release to call on President Abbas to negotiate, and we thank them for that. But President Abbas refuses to be pragmatic. He refuses to negotiate. He is not interested in finding a realistic solution to the conflict.

Let us not beat around the bush. Progress towards peace will not be made as long as President Abbas remains in his position. That is the reality. Only when he steps down can Israel and the Palestinians move forward. A leader who chooses rejectionism, incitement and glorification of terror can never be a real partner for real peace.

Israel has embraced the new innovative spirit of President Trump's plan and has agreed to use it as a starting point for negotiations. We thank President Trump and his team for their dedication to the cause of peace. Israel is criticized in this Chamber on a regular basis, but despite the lies and the hypocrisy, we are determined to fight for peace. We have always been willing to negotiate. We have on many occasions offered President Abbas opportunities to begin negotiations. But his response remains the same, and I encourage people to ask him, when they meet with him later today, why he is unwilling to meet with us. His response is always "no". He said it just the other week: "a thousand times no".

Peace is a core aspect of our belief, of the Jewish way of life. I urge the members of the Council to tell President Abbas that speeches here at the United Nations cannot replace direct negotiations. I urge them to tell President Abbas that, unlike him, they choose peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to once again welcome His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine. I express the appreciation of Tunisia for his efforts to defend the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

I would also like to commend the efforts of Secretary-General António Guterres to achieve peace in the Middle East and to support a peaceful settlement

of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the two-State solution and the internationally agreed parameters. I further commend the role of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

It is my pleasure, in the same context, to welcome His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. I appreciate his participation in this meeting in order to reaffirm the Arab position in support of the Palestinian question and its attachment to a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

My country's delegation would also like to thank the friendly Kingdom of Belgium, the current president of the Security Council, for convening this meeting.

This meeting is being held as the Arab-Israeli conflict is at a critical juncture. Tensions are rising in the region, the peace process is stalled and there have been attempts to depart from resolutions of international legitimacy and the fundamental parameters of the settlement that are the basis for comprehensive, lasting and just peace. The aim is to end the occupation and restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, most importantly their rights to self-determination and to establish their own independent State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Given the responsibility of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security and settle conflicts, we stress its important role in moving the peace process forward, on the basis of the agreed parameters and the two-State solution, with a view to settling all final status issues.

In that regard, over the past few days Tunisia and Indonesia, in close coordination with the Palestinians and in consultation with Security Council members, Arab and Muslim countries and regional and political groupings, especially the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, have started negotiations on a draft resolution. The draft text reaffirms the need to reach a comprehensive, lasting and just peace based on international resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, while ending the Israeli occupation of all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and promoting a two-State solution of two States living side by side in peace and security.

Tunisia would like to express its thanks and appreciation to Council members for engaging positively in those consultations with a view to enhancing the role of the Council and reaffirming international legitimacy, along with the two-State solution. In addition, the objective is to revive the prospects for peace based on the internationally agreed parameters in order to ensure the legitimate rights of the fraternal Palestinian people, end tensions and guarantee security and peace for all the peoples of the region.

The Israeli occupying Power continues to violate international resolutions and to impose a fait accompli by expanding its settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It continues to threaten to annex Palestinian territory, in stark violation of international law, to impose a blockade on the Gaza Strip and to collectively punish the Palestinian people. That calls on the international community to assume its responsibility and quickly take the necessary measures to put an end to those policies, which seriously undermine any prospects for peace and increase tensions and instability in the Middle East.

Tunisia is committed to international legitimacy and to the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, which represent a guarantee of security and stability in the world and a governing framework for international relations. We therefore stress the need for the international community to adopt a unified position against the violation of international law and the imposition of a fait accompli, and emphasizing the importance of multilateralism and the role of the United Nations in reaching a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We strongly believe that restoring security and stability in the region is contingent on Israel's ending its occupation of all occupied Arab territories and on compelling Israel to comply with the will to achieve peace and implement international resolutions.

In closing, Tunisia renews its commitment to maintaining its steadfast and principled support for the Palestinian question and the indivisible and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are not time-bound. We stress our attachment to peace as a strategic choice and affirm our support for any constructive efforts to revive the peace process based on international resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution as the only path to achieving a lasting, comprehensive and just peace.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Permit me, first of all, to express our appreciation to Belgium, as President of the Council for this month, for arranging this important meeting and, of course, to welcome His Excellency Philippe Goffin, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Belgium to the Chamber.

I would like to pay tribute to my brother, Ambassador Moncef Baati, for his service, dedication and friendship and to wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

We are honoured today by the presence of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine, the voice of the Palestinian people. Let me reassure him of the solidarity and full support of the Government and the people of Indonesia for the cause of the people of Palestine. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his remarks and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. Furthermore, I welcome His Excellency Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

We asked for this meeting today in response to recent developments in the region, including the announcement on 28 January of the plan on the Middle East, which may cause concern and affect the stability of the region and beyond. That new development has reminded us once again of the necessity of upholding the Charter of the United Nations and the spirit of multilateralism, which we hold near and dear to our hearts. Against that backdrop, allow me to make the following points.

First, Indonesia's position has been loud, clear and consistent and is firmly rooted in our constitutional mandate. That mandate guided Indonesia at the Bandung Conference of 1955, which concluded with the adoption of the Bandung Principles as a guide to achieving the full independence of all nations under occupation and colonialization. The Bandung Conference expressed Asian and African countries' support for the independence of Palestine. The people of Palestine have long been denied their legal and inalienable right to create a sovereign independent State. It is indeed a deplorable fact that the Palestinians have lost their lands to illegal settlers and continuous annexation by Israel as the occupying Power, in violation of many international laws. The human rights of the people of Palestine have been violated, and many have been forced to become refugees. The Security Council owes a debt to the people of Palestine and must

find solutions to the plight and dire humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. How long must we wait before we see an independent, sovereign State of Palestine?

Secondly, we reaffirm the two-State solution in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters. We call on the international community to respect the various decisions and resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967) and 2334 (2016), bearing in mind the vision of a region where two sovereign States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secured and recognized borders based on 4 June 1967 lines. Our objective must be to ensure respect for and the preservation of the integrity and contiguity of the Palestinian territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital. While we are of the view that we need to be realistic, the illegal actions and measures undertaken by the occupying Power, including changing the demographic character of the territories, will only imperil the viability of the two-State solution and jeopardize our pursuit of peace.

Thirdly, there is a need for credible multilateral negotiations. Indonesia calls for the early resumption of credible multilateral negotiations on the question of Palestine and reaffirms the importance of dialogue among the relevant parties, under the multilateral framework and guided by the internationally agreed parameters.

Any agreement on an issue of the magnitude of the Palestine-Israel conflict should be undertaken with the involvement of the two parties. Only then can we have a comprehensive and lasting peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

As a firm supporter of multilateralism, Indonesia has always taken a stance on the importance of upholding international law, including in settling international disputes and conflicts. It is worth underlining that the need for practical solutions should not come at the expense of international law, including various United Nations resolutions.

In closing, and in line with these reflections, Indonesia is pleased to observe that the Secretary-General affirmed the position of the United Nations on the matter, which is bound by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. We, the Security Council, have the authority, the duty and the moral obligation to ensure that all the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council are faithfully implemented. The Council and

its members, at the very least, should create a conducive atmosphere so that peace can prevail.

We, the Security Council, cannot afford to be seen as a spectator in the process of the maintenance of international peace and security, particularly in securing the independence of Palestine. This is a moral mission and a solemn duty that have slipped from our grasp over the past decades.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): I want to begin by welcoming President Abbas today to the Council and also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Mladenov and Ambassador Danon and my Council colleagues for their comments.

How the Council allocates its time defines who we are and what we believe is important. This is especially true of today's meeting, because finding a solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is important. It is important to President Trump. It is important to me personally. Based on our recent conversations, I know that it is very important to each member of the Council, and it is vitally important to both Israel and to the Palestinian people.

Since the formation of the United Nations, the Council and the General Assembly have demonstrated their belief in the importance of Middle East peace through countless hours of debate and by adopting more than 800 resolutions addressing this issue, but neither these debates nor these resolutions have resulted in a true and lasting peace.

So with a record of failure this spectacular, it would be folly to suggest that this time was well spent and that what is needed now is more of the same. That is why President Trump has proposed a new vision for peace that poses a tangible challenge to the status quo. Given that challenge, it is understandable that emotions are running high today and that strongly worded statements are being made.

I heard President Abbas speak of hope. I heard his words about the importance of hope. To keep hope alive, there must be a willingness to compromise, to engage in good faith, but we are not here to merely promise hope. Anyone can promise hope. We are here to deliver on hope, because that is what leaders do. It is what we are called to do today. But once we have said our piece today, I want us to begin thinking about what is going to happen tomorrow.

Rather than respond directly to today's fiery rhetoric, now is the time to set the table for a new conversation, a conversation during which we do not talk at each other but with each other a conversation that is a starting point, not a finishing line. And when I speak of a conversation, I want to be clear, as the President stated. We are not here to lecture. We are not here to tell other people how to live, who to be or how to worship. Instead, we are here to offer partnership based on shared interests and values. Such a partnership must begin with an understanding that real peace is never something theoretical. It is not something to be found on pieces of paper but in concrete experiences of security, economic opportunity and freedom. For too long, we have made the mistake of assuming that documents filled with high-level principles or theoretical concepts alone will lead to the kind of peace that provides for the dignity of all people.

But I am here to tell the Council today that this kind of peace, concrete, lasting, dignity-honouring peace, is intrinsic to the plan proposed by President Trump on 28 January. This vision for peace is different from any of its predecessors because it is specific and realistic. Israel's acceptance of the plan and its conceptual map represents a historic step towards the establishment of a Palestinian State with a capital in East Jerusalem. This vision shows respect for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's special role in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem and ensures the ability of Muslims from around the world to worship at the Al-Aqsa mosque.

I would emphasize especially to those who expressed concern that the plan offers something deeply meaningful to the Palestinian people: a realistic prospect for seeing, in their lifetime, a self-governing and fully recognized Palestinian State. The plan also recognizes that a political resolution to the conflict is not enough to ensure that the Palestinian people have opportunities to thrive, opportunities they need, opportunities they deserve.

The plan proposes historic levels of economic investment in the future State of Palestine — more than \$50 billion in total. Such an investment would reverse the brutal cycle of poverty that has trapped thousands of Palestinian men, women and children for decades. As President Trump said two weeks ago, he wants this plan “to be a great deal for the Palestinians. It has to be”.

In laying the foundations for widespread economic opportunity, the United States plan is more than a path

to Palestinian independence. It is a blueprint for the construction of a flourishing Palestinian State. This is not a proposal of peace in theory but of dignity in practice. The United States believes that this plan is realistic and implementable, and I will repeat here what senior adviser Jared Kushner has asserted on multiple occasions: this plan is not a take it or leave it; it is not my way or the highway; it is not set in stone. Rather, it is an opening offer. It is the beginning of a conversation, not the end of one. The United States stands willing to support all efforts to begin this conversation, and moving forward we hope that all parties will keep an open mind, listen and engage. I am optimistic that all Council members will give this approach a fair hearing rather than revert to the old habits that have not produced and cannot produce the peace that we all seek.

Above all, we hope that the Israelis and Palestinians will have the courage to sit down together to talk to one another. Council members have heard me say repeatedly that the United States will always stand by Israel, ensuring that its security is never threatened and that its prosperity is protected. That has not changed, and it never will. The people of Israel have no better friend than the United States, and I want them to know that as they forge a new path to peace, we will be with them every step of the way.

But I want to make clear that the United States also stands by the Palestinian people and supports their will for a better future for themselves and for their children. My fervent hope is that after today's rhetoric clears, Palestinian leaders will see this plan for the opportunity it is, roll up their sleeves and seize this chance to sit down with the leaders of Israel to begin a new conversation. Continuing to leave this conflict unresolved benefits only the extremists, who seek to radicalize younger generations and perpetuate the cycle of terrorism. But peaceful coexistence is not out of reach. By committing to extending freedom, dignity and opportunity to all Palestinians and Israelis, we can build the future we have all sought for so long. Only that way can the weapons of war at last be beaten into ploughshares, and can peace — true, lasting peace — descend on this land that is holy to so many. President Trump has stated that he wants President Abbas to know that if he chooses the path to peace, America and many other countries will be there.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of

President Abbas among us today. We are all here today in the presence of the Secretary-General because we share the conviction that it is necessary to resume the negotiations process between the parties with the view to achieving a just and lasting peace that meets the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

For France, a just and lasting peace hinges on respect for international law, compliance with all relevant Security Council resolutions. It must seek the establishment, alongside Israel, of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, within the framework of internationally agreed parameters. Those parameters are well known and have been endorsed on several occasions by the Council, most recently in resolution 2334 (2016). They are geared towards the objective of ensuring the existence of two States, within secure and internationally recognized borders, on the basis of the lines of 4 June 1967, with agreed swaps of comparable territory and with Jerusalem as the capital of the two States.

There is no ambiguity vis-à-vis what the two-State solution entails. The aim is to establish an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State that enjoys territorial contiguity and lives in peace and security alongside Israel. That necessitates security arrangements that guarantee Israel's security and safeguards the sovereignty of the Palestinian State. It also requires a just, equitable and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

We will continue to advocate a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in accordance with international law and within the framework of Council resolutions. International law and the decisions of the Council are not options that Member States can choose whether or not to respect. They are binding on all of us, in full, as required by the Charter of the United Nations. Respect for international law is a prerequisite for international peace and security and constitutes a guarantee of the effectiveness of our collective action.

That is not merely a position of principle. On the contrary, it reflects the deep conviction of France and its European partners that this solution alone is realistically able to put an end to the occupation and thereby deliver a just and lasting peace. Absent such a solution, the political vacuum and the continuing deterioration of the situation on the ground will fuel the despair of new generations and threaten to radicalize the young.

France remains resolutely committed to Israel's security. We strongly condemn all those who threaten it. President Macron reaffirmed that once again during his visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories last month. In that context, there is an urgent need to revive negotiations on the basis of agreed parameters to regenerate a political horizon. The plan announced by the United States is the fruit of efforts that have been under way for several months, which we have recognized as such.

I have recalled the framework within which France, the European Union and our Arab partners believe that the peace process must be relaunched. The active involvement of the main countries of the region, as well as the Europeans, is necessary to contribute to the resumption of the political process. The Arab Peace Initiative was a milestone in the process and remains fully relevant, as recalled by the Council of Minister for Foreign Affairs of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 1 February and also just now by the Tunisian representative. The European Union, which is a member of the Quartet and has been committed to resolving the conflict from the outset, stands ready to support the resumption of negotiations, as recalled by its High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles.

It is essential that both parties return to the negotiating table in good faith. Neither side should be marginalized. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires negotiation, not unilateral decisions. President Abbas' proposal to establish a multilateral mechanism to resume peace negotiations on the basis of previous resolutions and agreed parameters deserves close consideration in that context. We stand ready to engage in a discussion on those modalities.

France calls on the parties to establish conditions conducive to the resumption of discussions. That requires all parties to refrain from violence and incitement to violence, and an end to settlement activity and any unilateral measure contrary to international law, which would only increase tensions. In that regard, we caution against any decision to annex part of the West Bank.

I wish to conclude this statement by reiterating France's readiness to work, alongside all its partners and without further delay, to relaunch the peace process with the objective of arriving at a just and lasting peace and the stabilization of the Middle East. The role of the Council and the United Nations is to encourage

and support the resumption of negotiations on the basis of international law. The Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator have our full support in that regard.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks you, Mr. President, for presiding over this meeting. We also thank President Abbas and Secretary-General Aboul Gheit of the League of Arab States for their presence at today's public meeting. We further thank Secretary-General Guterres and Special Coordinator Mladenov for their briefings.

The question of Palestine, an issue that has remained unresolved for over 70 years, is the root cause of the turbulence in the Middle East. That issue calls into question the human conscience and international justice. Independent statehood is an inalienable national right of the Palestinian people. It cannot be subject to trading in any way. The Palestinian people continue to endure terrible suffering. Clashes and confrontations between Palestine and Israel are incessant. Settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian housing are continuing and expanding. The Middle East peace process has deviated from the right track. China is deeply worried.

China has noted the United States announcement of a new Middle East peace plan and the reactions of Palestine, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Secretary-General and others. China has always believed that the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus on the two-State solution and the principle of land for peace constitute an important foundation for resolving the question of Palestine. As such, they must be effectively observed. The question of Palestine can be settled only through political means.

Any proposed solution to this issue must be based on the views and opinions of the major parties, in particular those of Palestine, as well as on giving consideration to the voices of regional countries and organizations. Such a solution must be reached through dialogue and negotiations on an equal footing and contribute to a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the question of Palestine at an early date.

Over recent days, Council members have held intensive consultations on the question of Palestine. China supports the efforts of Tunisia and Indonesia in that regard. We believe that the Council must base its work on the resolutions adopted in the past; heed the voices of the Palestinian people; reaffirm its support for

the two-State solution, the importance of the relevant resolutions and existing international consensus; and call upon all parties to comply with international law in order to prevent the further complication and deterioration of the situation. China encourages all the parties to continue consultations in a responsible manner, while narrowing differences and widening consensus with a view to creating conditions conducive to resolving the issue.

China is highly concerned about the economic and humanitarian situation in Palestine. We call on the parties concerned to fulfil their international treaty obligations and the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations, comprehensively implement the relevant resolutions, fully lift the blockade against Gaza in a timely fashion, and improve the economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face financial shortages this year. The international community must increase its political and financial support to UNRWA so as to effectively improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian refugees and their host countries. It must also bolster its input into economic reconstruction in Palestine.

The Security Council bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. In the current circumstances, the Council should work alongside the international community and play a constructive role in seeking a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution to the question of Palestine at an early date. China remains firmly committed to supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his statement. I also thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Estonia welcomes all efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the long-lasting Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We welcome the United States initiative aimed at reviving the peace process, which has been stalled for years. It is essential that the European Union and the United States work together as closely as possible on this complex issue. We call on Israel and Palestine to take steps towards resuming direct and meaningful negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues, including issues related to borders, the status of

Jerusalem, security and the refugee question, with the aim of achieving a just and lasting peace.

Estonia's position on the Middle East peace process remains unchanged. The only way to reach lasting peace is through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of both parties. We remain committed to a negotiated two-State solution that meets both Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood, based on the 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps, as may be agreed between the parties, and that respects the internationally agreed parameters and relevant resolutions.

Recognizing that there are sensitivities related to several issues yet to be resolved, we urge all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from any unilateral actions that could further aggravate the tensions and undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We are concerned about the continuation of Israel's settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, in violation of international law. Annexation of any parts of the West Bank would be in contravention of international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

It is crucial that all parties refrain from acts of violence, terror and incitement. An escalation of violence would be negative for all sides and further undermine the prospects for a solution to the conflict. We also reiterate our commitment to the security of Israel.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Let me begin by joining others in thanking the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his introductory remarks, as well as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. I also welcome President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine; Ambassador Danny Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel; and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to the Chamber this morning.

The moral purpose of the United Nations is to ensure freedom for all nations and peoples — for all States, big and small. The foundational pledge to respect the political independence and territorial integrity of all States is one that our forebears did not take lightly. They knew all too well that, without mutual guarantees of sovereignty, the consequences would be anarchy and immense human suffering. For a small State like ours, which depends so heavily on a robust body of

international law for our peaceful existence, it is particularly unnerving to witness the slow unravelling of those internationally agreed norms. Indeed, one of the essential contributions to be made by small States like ours is the tireless advocacy for timeless principles enshrined in international law. We consider it our solemn obligation not only to articulate those principles but to ensure that they are applied consistently and upheld in the international community as universal truths, rather than as selective, uneven and unpredictable tools.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is deeply concerned about any attempts to deviate from the settled parameters governing the delicate quest for peace between Israel and Palestine. In that connection, we call for the full implementation of all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions calling for a cessation of all Israeli settlement activities, including those relating to Jerusalem and confirming that the latter is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory. We wish to underscore that any measures aimed at altering the legal, geographic and demographic character or status of Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territory as a whole are null and void and have no legal validity whatsoever.

While we acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the United States of America to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains committed to the international community's long-standing, principled support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination, and for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. That vision still reflects the will of the international community and ought to be our starting point. We will not resolve the conflict by simply moving the internationally agreed goalposts on an increasingly uneven playing field. We therefore support the calls for the resumption of negotiations under those internationally agreed parameters.

Echoing the Secretary-General's call, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is also of the view that we must never foreclose dialogue. There can be no real dialogue — and indeed, no real solution — without all parties at the table. However, there is a need for mediators that are acceptable to both Israel and Palestine. In the struggle for sustainable peace, we can claim no easy victories. Unresolved conflicts can be addressed only through equity and harmony. History has taught us that lasting peace can be achieved only through earnest attempts

at reconciliation. Indeed, there can be no peace without togetherness, and no togetherness without justice for all.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): First, I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian State, and thank him for his statement. We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his remarks, and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his briefing.

The quest for a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question continues to command the interest and concern of the relevant parties, countries in the Middle East and the international community. Viet Nam joins the international community in reaffirming our strong support for the legitimate struggles of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights. We firmly believe in and strongly support the two-State solution, including the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with the borders enshrined in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, living side by side with the State of Israel in peaceful coexistence, security and mutual recognition.

After decades, peace and a final settlement remain elusive. We share the deep concerns of other Security Council members with regard to Israel's continued settlement activities and the recent call for the annexation of parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. We therefore call on and support the relevant party in striving for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement, through dialogue and negotiations, on the basis of respect for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including resolution 2334 (2016), with the consent of the parties concerned. We are convinced that such a peace agreement can be reached only by exercising restraint, avoiding actions that might further complicate the situation and maintaining direct dialogue. It is our sincere hope that the parties will engage in discussion in good faith and in a constructive manner.

To that end, Viet Nam welcomes all initiatives and efforts to restart the Middle East peace process, based on international law and bilateral agreements. We are ready to make a positive contribution to the promotion of dialogue and negotiations, within and beyond the United Nations, with a view to achieving a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ensures the

legitimate rights and interests of Palestinians and the other party concerned.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): First of all, let me extend a very special welcome to His Excellency President Abbas. Let me also thank the Secretary-General, Special Coordinator Mladenov and Ambassador Danon for their remarks and statements. I would also like to extend a special welcome to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul-Gheit.

Germany remains firmly committed to a negotiated two-State solution, based on 4 June 1967 lines, with equivalent land swaps, as may be agreed between the parties, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States, and with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

We continue to believe that the two-State solution is the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs, fulfils Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, resolves all permanent-status issues and guarantees equal rights for all.

Unilateral actions and creating facts on the ground in order to impose a certain outcome are counterproductive and will neither bring about a just and lasting solution nor lead to a sustainable peace and security. To achieve a just and lasting solution, final status issues, including the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and the refugee situation, must be resolved through direct negotiations between both parties. We therefore call on the parties to the conflict, and on all international stakeholders, to refrain from taking any measures that risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-State solution on the basis of international law, all relevant United Nations resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters.

We have taken note of the proposals presented by United States in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and have determined that they depart from the internationally agreed parameters, notably on the final-status issues, with regard to the status of Jerusalem, future borders and Israeli settlements. The Middle East peace process has been stalled for too long, and the absence of direct negotiations towards a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict is

source of frustration, first and foremost for the people in Israel and for the Palestinians, who desperately need and want peace. We therefore welcome fresh thinking and any efforts that aim at reviving the political process and reaffirm our belief that any viable proposal for direct negotiations must be accepted by both parties. The previous resolutions of the Council reflect both international law as well as parameters for negotiations that both parties have previously accepted in negotiations.

The most recent proposals by the United States contain detailed provisions for future negotiations that merit thorough analysis and discussion, as they raise a number of pertinent questions of great importance to both parties. We therefore believe that establishing or reviving a multilateral format would enable us to elaborate the most recent proposal and others before it. Those discussions could be helpful in achieving the shared objective of creating an environment conducive to the resumption of meaningful and genuine negotiations between the parties to resolve all permanent-status issues and to achieve a negotiated, just and viable solution to the conflict.

We welcome the proposals to that effect and have taken note of President Abbas's ideas in that regard. We noted that the international community expressed its willingness to support the parties in returning to direct negotiations. Both parties are therefore invited to submit suggestions for multilateral formats to advance discussions on proposals for the Middle East peace process, including the recent proposals by the United States. Meanwhile, we call on both sides, as well as relevant actors in the region, to show their commitment to a negotiated solution to the conflict through confidence-building measures.

One of the main obstacles to a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the ongoing Israeli occupation and the continued settlement activities in the territories occupied since 1967. We reiterate our position that Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. They undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and achieving a negotiated two-State-solution. We note that the most recent proposal submitted by the United States includes an immediate temporary halt to the expansion of existing settlements. Adherence to that proposal would be an important step in building confidence in renewed efforts towards

negotiations and would be in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We remain extremely concerned about the repeated statements by Israeli officials alluding to or announcing an intended annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the occupied West Bank. The annexation of any part of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, constitutes a breach of international law, undermines the viability of the two-State solution and challenges the prospects for just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Steps towards annexation, if implemented, would not be recognized and would have serious negative repercussions across the region. We therefore strongly advise the Israeli Government against taking any steps in that direction. If carried out, such steps would severely undermine any new initiative for negotiations between both parties, including the most recent efforts by the United States.

We reiterate that Germany will continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

We are encouraged by President Abbas's call for elections. We believe that free and fair elections should take place without undue delay. Those elections would constitute an important step towards the legitimacy of Palestinian self-governance and towards building confidence in the peace process.

We are concerned that the growing division between the Palestinian citizens living in Gaza and those living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem undermines the prospect for peace negotiations. We therefore call on the Palestinian leadership to redouble efforts to pave the way towards reconciliation, and we appreciate the efforts by Egypt in that regard.

Fully implementing resolution 2334 (2016) would be an important step towards building confidence in the recent efforts to advance Middle East peace. As we have stated before, that includes credible and substantive efforts to prevent acts of terrorism, violence against civilians, incitement, provocative actions and inflammatory rhetoric. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad must stop firing rockets into Israel. There is no justification for the firing of rockets into Israel or any other form of terrorism, which Germany strongly condemns.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to Israel's security and stress Israel's right to self-defence and its right to react adequately and proportionally to attacks against its territory. We will not be silent whenever Israel's security or right to exist is questioned or compromised. However, incidents in which innocent civilians are indiscriminately targeted and subjected to violence must be thoroughly investigated, and accountability for violations of international law must be ensured.

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): South Africa is grateful to Belgium for scheduling this meeting today. We welcome in particular the President of the State of Palestine, His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, to the Security Council and thank him for his important statement, in which he has articulated the true aspirations and the voice of the people of occupied Palestine — a people who lives under occupation in an asymmetrical environment and, for decades, has fought for its right to self-determination and for the recognition of its basic human rights. We also wish to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for the Middle East for their important briefings this morning.

The Security Council held its first meeting on the matter of Palestine (see S/PV.222) on 9 December 1947. In the over 72 years since then, we have, unfortunately, not progressed in resolving this matter, as the views and aspirations of the Palestinian people have been consistently ignored. In that context, the Palestinian people have once again sought to come to the Council to set out their substantive legal and political case. It is our responsibility, as the organ tasked with maintaining international peace and security, to take on this task and assist both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

South Africa notes the recent developments that have brought renewed focus and attention to this decades-long conflict. Unfortunately, the recent initiative and proposal do not take into account the substantive views and aspirations of the Palestinian people. It is only through initiatives developed with the full participation of all parties, specifically the Palestinians, that lasting peace and stability can be achieved. A genuine, inclusive and open dialogue, where both parties are at the table, is the only means to resolve this current impasse. Peace cannot be imposed. It can be premised only on a mutually acceptable and just solution.

It has been universally acknowledged, in the Security Council and in other international forums, that the only way peace can be established between the Israelis and the Palestinians is through direct negotiations between them. The Security Council must help create an environment that will allow Israel and Palestine to come together, as equals, to resume the peace process.

Peace initiatives aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must conform to the internationally agreed terms of reference and parameters, including the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative, the initiatives of the Quartet and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council — resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 2334 (2016), among others. Flagrant violations of international law, at the expense of what is deemed by some as political reality or expediency, undermine the rule of just law and the global multilateral system, which has developed over the past 75 years.

South Africa's position on the question of Palestine is very clear. We have consistently called for a peaceful, negotiated settlement and continue to support international efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian State, existing side by side and in peace with Israel, within internationally recognized borders, based on those existing on 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and other internationally agreed parameters. That is also in line with the sentiments expressed in the African Union summit just concluded in Addis Ababa, where African Union leaders reaffirmed the African continent's solidarity with the people of Palestine in support of their inalienable right to self-determination.

South Africa maintains its principled position that any peace plan should not allow Palestinian statehood to devolve into an entity devoid of sovereignty, territorial contiguity and economic viability. Doing so would severely compound the failure of previous peacemaking efforts, accelerate the demise of the idea of a two-State solution and fatally damage the cause of durable peace for the Palestinians and the Israelis alike.

Any solution must therefore be premised on a just settlement with just laws. It must focus on rights and facilitate equality and equity for all who have a right to live in the territories of Israel and Palestine. That includes sovereign equality between States.

Consequently, all final-status issues, including illegal Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem and the right of refugees to return to their homeland, must be settled in accordance with international law.

In conclusion, 11 February is a historic day in South Africa's history, and indeed in the history of oppressed people worldwide, for it is on this day, 30 years ago, that Nelson Mandela was released from prison after 27 years in captivity. His release and eventual election to the highest office as the President of a united and democratic South Africa demonstrated that what for some had seemed to be an intractable conflict was actually solvable. May that serve as a lesson for finding peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I welcome you to the Security Council, Sir, for Belgium's presidency. I join others in welcoming President Abbas and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. I also thank Secretary-General Guterres and Mr. Mladenov for their remarks.

As we have heard today, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has blighted an entire region and untold lives. To this day, its implications are felt across the Middle East and around the world. It is almost as old as the Security Council and has gone on for too long.

The United Kingdom's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process is clear and has not changed. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. The United Kingdom's commitment to the resolutions of the Council is unwavering, and we support what the German representative said about Israel's security.

We need to acknowledge that progress towards meaningful peace has stalled. The absence of dialogue risks a prolonged political vacuum that will only fuel instability and extremism. Israelis and Palestinians deserve better. They deserve a durable resolution that provides all with dignity and security. Palestinians deserve self-determination and freedom from occupation. Israelis deserve to live free of terrorist rocket fire and in a future characterized by fruitful cooperation with their neighbours in the region. That can be achieved only by finding a path back to

negotiations and securing a settlement that is acceptable to all parties. No other path to peace exists.

It has been over a decade since the last direct negotiations, as we have heard today. A resolution of the issue has only become harder, illegal settlements have expanded, acrimony between Palestinian factions has deepened. If we try again only in another half decade, a settlement will be harder still. Our American colleagues have offered proposals to break the deadlock that represent genuine desire to resolve the conflict. The United Kingdom does not believe the proposals are the end of the road, but we hope that they may lead to a first step. Both Israeli and Palestinian leaders owe it to their people to give them due consideration.

Let me, if I may, extend the regards of my Prime Minister to President Abbas. President Abbas has long championed peace and dialogue. We have not forgotten. All of us here today understand that the proposals put forward by the United States may feel very different to what has been discussed before. Time will be needed to digest them, and members of the Council should strive to provide that. President Abbas has expressed serious concerns with the proposals, as is certainly his right. It is for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to determine whether the plan meets the needs and aspirations of those they represent. However, where there is disagreement or even outrage, the only path to resolution is dialogue. The United States proposals now on the table, the United Kingdom looks to the Palestinian leadership to offer its own vision for a settlement and to find a way of re-engaging with the negotiation process so that its concerns can be considered and discussed.

Let me be clear: unilateral action by either party is unacceptable. The United Kingdom Government, including our Foreign Secretary, most recently in his statement on 31 January, has made clear our serious concern about reports of possible moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel. I have said in the Council before, and I repeat, that any such unilateral moves would be contrary to international law and damaging to renewed efforts to restart peace negotiations. We hope that President Abbas returns to negotiations, but if he cannot, that would not justify annexation. Any changes to the status quo cannot be taken forward without an agreement negotiated by the parties themselves.

Let me conclude by reiterating the contention of my Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. We must

now take the first step on the road back to negotiations. There is no other way forward.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we thank the Secretary-General for his presence and his briefing. We also thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his detailed report on the current situation in the region. We welcome President Mahmoud Abbas, to whom we extend the appreciation and consideration of the Dominican people. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Philippe Goffin.

The Dominican Republic, as a country whose fundamental principles include respect for human rights and international law, which recognizes an international legal order that guarantees respect for the fundamental rights to peace, justice and the political, social, economic and cultural development of nations and is committed to peaceful coexistence and solidarity among nations, calls for the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution that addresses the legitimate needs of the parties to the conflict. In that regard, the position of the Dominican Republic, which is consistent with those principles, continues to be respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We therefore reaffirm our full support for a two-State solution, as set out in the various United Nations resolutions.

In order to reach an agreement between the parties, the Dominican Republic considers it vital to redouble reconciliation efforts, with the support of the international community, in order to guarantee the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Israel to live in peace, within secure and recognized borders. We understand that is the only way to obtain a just and lasting peace that will resolve a conflict that for decades has eclipsed regional and international peace and security. We are convinced that it is unnecessary to formulate new resolutions or to return to paths already taken. The Dominican Republic remains committed to the frame of reference based on previous resolutions and bilateral agreements between Israelis and Palestinians. We encourage the parties to promote genuine dialogue and to relaunch negotiations on a peace plan based on internationally reached agreements. As the international community, we understand that our collective action must be aimed at contributing in an impartial and effective manner to the quest for real solutions. We

reiterate the need to increase efforts and continue working tirelessly until a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect is resumed, leading to a new stage in the construction of a genuine peace between Israel and Palestine.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to see Minister Goffin preside over the Security Council and to welcome the President of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. We thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his statement and are grateful to the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his report on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We welcome the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

We are firmly convinced and have consistently stated that the lack of a resolution to the Palestinian issue remains among the key factors of instability in the Middle East, which fuels extremist and radical sentiment and incites public resentment among ordinary Palestinians and Arabs. The Russian Federation has supported and continues to support a just solution to the Palestinian issue on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, which provide for the creation of an independent, sovereign, territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel. Our vision for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement coincides and aligns with the consolidated Arab assessments that have been reflected in the final outcome of the ministerial meeting of the League of Arab States that was held on 1 February in Cairo.

The European Union, in a special statement dated 4 February, confirmed its full commitment to the two-State solution. The present United States Administration has proposed another way to resolve the protracted Palestine-Israeli conflict through a path that fails to reflect the core elements of the universally recognized international legal framework for the Middle East peace process, as set out in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We have stated repeatedly that we will accept a settlement plan that is mutually acceptable to both sides. However, what is to be done when one side, the Palestinian side, regards the plan as unjust and refuses to accept it? This is a plan that proposes to resolve

key final-status issues for the Palestinian territory, including borders, settlements, East Jerusalem, refugees and fundamental security issues, at the expense of unilateral concessions.

And how is it possible to achieve a fair, just settlement unilaterally? Admittedly, given current circumstances, there is one silver lining: the fact that the Palestinian problem, which for many years was relegated to the back track while everybody waited for the United States to finally present its Middle East initiative, amid turbulence in the Middle East, is once again in the international spotlight.

The “deal of the century” — regardless of what views there may be in that respect — has drawn attention to the need to resolve the Palestinian issue. However, we are convinced that there is a need to ensure cohesive action on the part of the international community to achieve a just, long-term Middle East settlement. We believe that, given the situation that has unfolded, there is a need to revitalize the efforts of the Quartet of international mediators, which is the sole mechanism recognized by the Security Council to support the Middle East peace process. Russia, as a member of the Quartet, stands ready to engage in close coordination with Arab partners, Israel, the Palestinians and all interested parties in order to help facilitate a compromise. What is all the more relevant under these circumstances is bringing Palestinians together to uphold the shared national interests of the Palestinian people.

Russia has been making efforts to restore inter-Palestinian unity, and we welcome the efforts undertaken by our Egyptian colleagues to that end. In close contacts with both Palestinians and Israelis, we will continue to steadfastly urge them to adopt a constructive approach in order to agree on negotiated solutions to all pending issues. We note that, despite the differences of views, both President Abbas and the representative of Israel, Danny Danon, today spoke of the need for negotiations. We should like to see here an opportunity for the advancement of the Middle East settlement in order to achieve a just solution. In that context, we reiterate our proposal to provide a platform for direct negotiations between the leaderships of Israel and Palestine in Moscow.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Belgium.

The peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the most long-standing conflicts on the Security Council's agenda, can be a factor of peace and stability in a particularly troubled region. Belgium therefore deems it important that the international community redouble its efforts to contribute to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

Our position has not changed. With its European Union partners, Belgium has always stressed that a credible negotiating process must take place within the framework of international law and include the relevant resolutions of the Council. There is no sustainable and realistic alternative to meet the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians for lasting peace. To facilitate the negotiation of such a solution, the international community has set out parameters from the outset. Allow me to recall them here.

The first is an agreement on the borders between the two States on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967, with land swaps mutually agreed between the parties. In that regard, Belgium deems the policy of settlements to be illegal under international law and to constitute a growing risk to the two-State solution. Any credible initiative to relaunch the peace process must be accompanied by measures aimed at putting an end to that policy. Moreover, any unilateral annexation would constitute a flagrant violation of international law and be an obstacle to peace. Recent statements in that regard are extremely worrisome. The European Union will not recognize any changes made to the pre-1967 borders, including as concerns Jerusalem, unless they have been accepted beforehand by the parties.

Secondly, a just, equitable and realistic solution to the issue of refugees is a prerequisite. In that context, Belgium continues to support the indispensable work done on the ground by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and calls on all its partners to do the same.

Thirdly, concerning Jerusalem, we must find through negotiations a way to settle the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States that in particular will do justice to the aspirations of all its inhabitants.

Fourthly, there must be provisions made in the area of security that respect Palestinian sovereignty and show that the occupation is over, and that ensure Israeli security, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and

respond effectively to the threats that have emerged in the region and to the unacceptable attempts of those who try to call into question the very existence of Israel.

A lasting solution requires a State of Israel with legitimacy recognized by all States and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, so that the two States can live side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

Those parameters address extremely sensitive issues. Any contribution to relaunching negotiations is welcome, but unilaterally calling into question those parameters could exacerbate tensions, which are also already very high on the ground. We therefore call on all parties to show the greatest restraint and respect international law.

The American vision has put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict back at the top of the international and diplomatic agenda, and it underscores the importance of the international community becoming mobilized once again in order to provide an environment that is favourable to good-faith negotiations between the parties.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be urgently resolved in the context of a dialogue between the parties, supported by the multilateral system established by the international community in 1945 as a framework for relations among its members, within which Belgium believes has a fundamental responsibility.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Aboul Gheit.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (*spoke in Arabic*): In my capacity as the representative of the League of Arab States, I address the Security Council following the League's ministerial meeting that took a collective decision on 1 February to reject the peace plan for Palestinians and Israelis proposed by the United States of America on 28 January. That rejection did not come out of the blue or without explanation.

There have been well-known and established givens in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, primarily the significant imbalance of forces on the ground between a party under occupation and another party, namely, the occupying Power. That has been set out for decades, but it is not the entire issue. In fact, international legitimacy is on the side of the Palestinian people. As

embodied by the Security Council, and more broadly by the United Nations, international law constitutes the primary support for the Palestinians in this protracted conflict, even before the support of their Arab brethren.

The Palestinian people, even with the support of their Arab brethren, do not have a choice but to remain steadfast on their land first and then call for the Council's sense of justice and fairness. Direct negotiations, which should have led to a road map for a sovereign and independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders, nearly 50 years ago, regrettably did not lead to anything.

The presentation of the United States plan was preceded by many proactive measures, as mentioned by President Mahmoud Abbas, all of which would have a direct impact on the issues that were agreed upon in Oslo to be negotiated, such as Jerusalem and refugees. These measures are clearly geared towards settling those issues for the benefit of the Israeli side, prior to any negotiations. Then came the plan as if it were the outcome of negotiations between the mediator and Israel. Palestinians were not consulted, as we heard, much less informed about the content of the plan, which directly impacts their fate. It is now being demanded that they accept the plan and succumb, or subsequently be obligated in the near future to accept its unilateral implementation. It is as if the plan had been drafted to be rejected by the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, and then be imposed unilaterally, leaving us to face a new version of unilateral withdrawal plans promoted by the Israeli right but under the slogan of a permanent solution. All of this negates the basis of neutral mediation.

In principle, we welcome the interest of the Government of the United States to seek a political settlement to this conflict. We welcome this initiative; but, unfortunately, we found that the proposed plan contravenes the principles that the United States itself set out as the basis for a lasting solution when it committed to a political settlement for the Israeli-Arab conflict 40 years ago. First and foremost among those principles is that of land for peace, which means ending the occupation versus achieving security, recognition and the beginning of peaceful relations in exchange.

The proposed plan includes new parameters that can be summarized as follows: granting land, settlements, Jerusalem and security to Israel and then normalization and peace — also for Israel. As for the Palestinians,

they will merely get a dismembered territory, without sovereignty or Jerusalem and without an acceptable solution to the problem of refugees. In short, this is not even tantamount to full autonomy, let alone an independent State.

The plan does not propose the two-State solution, even if it mentions it. What it proposes falls well short of that. This is a plan that practically suggests the creation of a single State with two categories of people: citizens enjoying full-fledged citizenship and others with no rights. This is shameful, as has been echoed here in the Chamber, along with condemnation and denunciation. Will the international community accept a new apartheid in the Middle East? On the holy land?

The Arab and Palestinian position is not rejection for the sake of rejection. Neither is it allowing an opportunity to slip away, as some might say repeatedly, as if we were pleased to live in an endless conflicts and crises. We Arabs have a peace proposal as well, based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. It was a robust, clear and simple initiative presented to Israel, seeking normalization of relations with 22 Arab States — if Israel ended its occupation and allowed a Palestinian State to emerge along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, accompanied with an agreed solution for the refugees issue. Those are the principles of the Arab solution. Our initiative does not include details because we do not want to impose details. We want to help both parties reach a solution through negotiations — I repeat, through negotiations — between the two parties concerned.

Turning to the United States plan, it undermines the very meaning of negotiations. There was no need for the mediator to present a solution detailing what the lasting solution was to be, unless the two parties requested that. It should have been the outcome of direct negotiations.

I have worked for decades towards achieving peace in the Middle East. I have learned an important lesson, namely, that there can be no lasting peace between two parties unless it is based on justice. There can be no peace in the Middle East if it means one party acknowledging defeat and forced to succumb. That would unfortunately lead to the continuation of the conflict. Dashing the national aspirations of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence while attempting to obliterate their national dream and push them to yield to an unfair settlement would be a major

sin on an international level, were the international community to permit it.

Perhaps the current balance of power today allows for ideas such as these to emerge. However, there is no doubt that such ideas cannot pave the way towards genuine security, lasting peace or a historic settlement to a conflict that has lasted for decades.

We demand that the international community safeguard its credibility and uphold the principles it has established and called on the two parties to acknowledge. Those principles came to be required for a settlement, and most Palestinians believed in them and struggled for the last three decades to achieve them, since the signing of the Oslo Accords. If those principles are neglected, the credibility of the international community would be at stake and the position of the Palestinians, who have

embraced the path towards achieving just peace and political settlement, would be weakened.

In conclusion, I was appalled to hear a while ago a clear call to exclude Palestinian President Abu Mazen, characterizing him as not a true partner in making peace. Such rhetoric demonstrates ill intentions vis-à-vis the Palestinian President and a real cause for concern. This way of thinking clearly reflects a personal problem, because I strongly believe that if Abu Mazen does not sign, no other Palestinian will sign. Those are the ambitions and rights of a people and not a leadership problem. I heard similar rhetoric 15 years ago, targeting another Palestinian President. Both of them rejected the proposal and did not give up.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.