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New York

President: Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone)

Members:

Algeria	Mr. Gaouaoui
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana	Ms. Persaud
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Dr. Michael Ryan, Deputy Director-General and Executive Director, Health Emergencies Programme, World Health Organization.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Msuya.

Ms. Msuya: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

First, allow me to echo the Secretary-General's deep concern about the latest deterioration in the occupied West Bank and his call for the immediate cessation of those operations.

The situation in Gaza is beyond desperate. Since 7 October 2023, we have briefed the Council on the unconscionable suffering of civilian women, men and children on more than a dozen occasions. We have repeatedly informed members of the harrowing levels of death, injury and destruction, which raise very serious concerns about compliance with international humanitarian law. So far, more than 1,000 people have been killed in Israel, including on 7 October 2023, and 108 hostages remain in captivity, and their conditions and treatment are matters of serious concern. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, more than 40,000 people have been killed and more than 93,000 injured in Gaza — many of them women and children — and more than 17,000 Palestinian children are unaccompanied or separated from their relatives and guardians. Reports of the ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israel are mounting.

Already challenged, our humanitarian response is facing unparalleled difficulty. In the past week alone, our teams have been displaced and shot at. We have

lost offices and warehouses, and limited supplies have continued to dwindle. World Food Programme colleagues were fired upon two days ago in their marked vehicle and survived by sheer luck. We cannot plan more than 24 hours in advance because we struggle to know what supplies we will have, when we will have them or where we will be able to deliver. The lives of 2.1 million people cannot depend on luck and hope alone.

Evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military have spiked, with devastating impacts on civilians. So far this month, 16 orders have been issued. Between 19 and 24 August alone, five such orders were issued — the largest number of orders issued in a single week since the start of the crisis. Those orders affected a quarter of a million people in 33 neighbourhoods in Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis and northern Gaza. Health clinics, water wells, a desalination plant and a water reservoir, as well as the Al-Aqsa Hospital, one of the last functioning larger hospitals in Gaza, were all affected by the most recent orders. Water production in Deir Al-Balah has been reduced by around 85 per cent. The subsequent evacuation order on 25 August led to the largest relocation of United Nations staff since we were forced to leave northern Gaza in October 2023. In the past few days, some 200 staff were affected, along with nine United Nations guest houses, four United Nations warehouses and six guest houses belonging to non-governmental organizations. More than 88 per cent of Gaza's territory has come under an order to evacuate at some point. Communities live in a state of limbo, never knowing when the next order to flee will come. Civilians are being forced into an ever-smaller area, now equivalent to just 11 per cent of the territory of Gaza.

It is difficult to put into words the immense struggle that people are facing to find shelter and other essentials. Any and every square foot of available land is being used for shelter. Temporary encampments have even been built on the beach, right up to the water's edge. The evacuation orders appear to defy the requirements of international humanitarian law. It therefore comes as some relief to hear this morning that, following calls by the United Nations and Member States, the Israeli military has issued a reversal of orders for three blocks in the southern neighbourhoods of Deir Al-Balah. It is the first time evacuation orders have been reversed since the start of the conflict. Our teams are working to confirm if we can now return to the premises we had to leave on 25 August.

Civilians are hungry. They are thirsty. They are sick. They are homeless. They have been pushed beyond the limits of endurance, beyond what any human being should bear. The United Nations and our humanitarian partners continue to do what we can under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Muhannad Hadi. We remain on the ground, planning as best we can in these extreme circumstances. Despite insufficient stocks, our partners continue to provide assistance and protection services. That includes food and health-care consultations and, when possible, shelter material. Amid the destruction, they are also creating spaces for children to learn.

As we will hear from my colleague Dr. Ryan, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization, the humanitarian community is working relentlessly to stop the spread of polio — a disease that the world thought it had under control. Israel has facilitated the entry of all requested polio vaccines, along with the equipment required to implement the immunization campaign. What is now most important is to ensure both the security and the access needed to implement the campaign effectively. I do not need to tell members how disastrous it would be if we were unable to contain this preventable disease — a disease that knows no borders. The same access must be afforded to all life-sustaining supplies and services in Gaza. We welcome the tireless efforts of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator and her engagement with States of the region and the Government of Israel to streamline assistance into Gaza under resolution 2720 (2023) and her advocacy for the safety and security of humanitarian workers and an enabling environment for scaling up humanitarian operations.

What we have witnessed over the past 11 months — and what we continue to witness — calls into question the world's commitment to the international legal order that was designed to prevent such tragedies. It forces us to ask: what has become of our basic sense of humanity? In the face of that unconscionable human suffering, we need the Security Council and all Member States to act. That is all the more urgent as tensions flare dangerously across other parts of the occupied Palestinian territory and the region.

We need strict adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. All hostages must be released without conditions. Civilians must be protected, and their essential needs must be met, including by ensuring the unhindered

provision of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza. We appeal to Council members and all Member States to use the leverage available to them to ensure respect for international law, combat impunity and reach an immediate cessation of hostilities and a sustained ceasefire in Gaza.

The President: I thank Ms. Msuya for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Dr. Ryan.

Dr. Ryan: It has been 11 months of continued violence. More than 1,500 people have been killed in Israel, with 107 hostages yet to be released. More than 40,000 people have been killed in Gaza, and more than 600 people have been killed in the West Bank. This relentless conflict has far-reaching consequences for the health and well-being of the people of Palestine and Israel and the wider region. The absence of the most basic public health interventions in Gaza for 11 months has resulted in the spread of diseases, including, sadly, the resurgence of polio. The first case of polio has now been confirmed after 25 years of a polio-free Palestine. The 10-month-old infant was born during wartime and never vaccinated.

The global community has made tremendous strides in the fight against polio since the inception of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in 1988, with polio being targeted to be only the second disease ever eradicated by humankind on the planet. Through the widespread administration of polio vaccine, cases of wild poliovirus have plummeted by 99.9 per cent, and two of the three strains of the wild poliovirus have been eradicated. However, the conflict in Gaza has brought a resurgence of the circulating variant poliovirus type 2 — Council members will hear the term cVDPV2 — threatening to undo decades of progress. The current outbreak in Gaza is a stark reminder of how quickly infectious diseases can re-emerge where health systems are compromised. Many other diseases are spreading, while our collective capacities to prevent, detect and respond to them continue to be hindered.

We welcome the commitment to area-specific humanitarian pauses and suspension of evacuation orders for the implementation of a two-round polio vaccine campaign, set to begin on 1 September in the Gaza Strip. During each round of the campaign, the Palestinian Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other partners, will

provide two drops of the WHO-prequalified novel oral polio vaccine type 2, or nOPV2, to more than 640,000 children under 10 years of age. The first campaign has a phased approach, starting with central Gaza, followed by south Gaza, followed by north Gaza, each area covered over three days. That agreement is a testament to our collective commitment to overcoming barriers and protecting every child from polio.

We stress that it is critically important for all parties to adhere to the commitments that have been made. A total of 1.26 million doses of vaccines and 500 vaccine carriers have been delivered to Gaza, with 400,000 additional doses to arrive soon. More than 2,000 health workers and community outreach workers have been trained to provide vaccination and to inform communities about the campaign. At least 90 per cent of coverage is needed during each round of the campaign in order to stop the outbreak and prevent international spread of polio.

Owing to insecurity, damage to roads and infrastructure, constant population displacement and the highly constrained operating conditions, conducting the campaign for just three days in each area is unlikely to be sufficient to achieve adequate vaccination coverage. Vaccination coverage will be monitored throughout the campaign, and it has been agreed that vaccination will be extended by one day wherever necessary to vaccinate all children. From our experience, we know that an additional day or two is very often needed to achieve sufficient coverage. The pauses will allow children, families and health workers to move safely, ensuring that vaccines are administered efficiently across all zones.

The safety of every single one of the 2,180 vaccinators must be guaranteed. Their security is paramount. We urge all parties to ensure their protection and that of health facilities, children and their families.

The polio outbreak is occurring within a much larger public health catastrophe. As of 25 August, only 44 per cent of 132 primary health-care facilities are functioning. Only 17 out of 36 hospitals are providing services, and those are only partially functioning. The functionality of health systems is compromised by physical damage, lack of fuel, limited medical supplies and loss of staff.

As of 23 August, there are nine operational field hospitals: two in Deir Al-Balah, five in Khan Younis and two in Rafah. Hospitals in the north are facing dire

shortages of fuel. Yesterday, WHO managed to reach the Indonesian hospital to deliver fuel, while in the past two weeks, only one of WHO's six requested missions was facilitated to deliver fuel and medical supplies to northern Gaza.

While the health system has been massively degraded, attacks on health care continue to be reported. From 7 October 2023 to 22 August, WHO has documented 1,098 health attacks in the occupied Palestinian territory, 492 of which occurred in Gaza, resulting in 747 fatalities and 969 injuries.

Evacuation orders are further disrupting the provision of health care, endangering critical health infrastructure and hampering the delivery of essential supplies. Eleven hospitals, 17 primary health-care centres and 51 medical points have been directly affected by the multiple evacuation orders, resulting in the loss of approximately 1,300 beds. The closure of three centres for the management of severe acute malnutrition also puts acutely malnourished children at further risk of life-threatening crises.

Despite those challenges, WHO and its health cluster partners and emergency medical teams continue to deliver health care on the ground. Sixty-three health cluster partners are currently operating in Gaza, reaching a weekly average of 338,000 people with various health services and supplies. Fifteen emergency medical teams are currently operating in Gaza, running primary health-care facilities and field hospitals and reinforcing existing hospitals with specialized services, such as surgery. Close to 1.4 million consultations have been provided by emergency medical teams to date, and 242 primary health-care service points are currently operated by partners.

Medical evacuation of patients outside of Gaza remains severely limited, with only 122 patients evacuated since 7 May. Out of 14,192 cases requested for medical evacuation, only 5,012, or 35 per cent, have been evacuated since October 2023. Of the utmost urgency is the restoration of medical evacuations from Gaza to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where hospitals are ready to receive patients. The transfer of patients to Egypt and Jordan, and from there to third countries when needed, must be facilitated. WHO appeals for the establishment of multiple medical evacuation corridors to ensure the sustained, organized, safe and timely passage of patients via all possible routes, including Rafah and Kerem Shalom.

The destruction of water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure has also contributed to the spread of infectious diseases. With 67 per cent of Gaza's water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure damaged or destroyed, and with only minimal access to clean water, rates of diarrhoeal diseases have increased significantly. More than 25 per cent of the population is suffering from water- and sanitation-related diseases, including bloody diarrhoea, hepatitis A and skin diseases, such as scabies. Other epidemic risks are also on the rise owing to continued displacement and worsening living conditions.

The situation in the West Bank is also deteriorating, with increased military actions and restrictions on movement severely hampering access to health care. Roads near Jenin's Ibn Sina and Al-Razi hospitals have been bulldozed. Military presence in the vicinity of the Jenin government hospital is deterring patients from seeking health care. In Tubas and Tulkarm, movements of health workers and ambulances were obstructed while trying to reach the injured. The disruption of ambulance services and the obstruction of patients' access to hospitals further threaten the lives of those in need of urgent care.

The world cannot stand by as Gaza's health system crumbles under the weight of the conflict. The international community must act now to secure humanitarian pauses, ensure the delivery of critical health supplies and support the rapid implementation of the polio vaccination campaign, which needs to also mark a significant change in how humanitarian response in Gaza is delivered. Aid needs to be delivered at a much larger scale and at a much faster pace, without any hindrance. Failure to act will have catastrophic consequences not only for the children of Gaza but for the population of the region and the world. The call for an immediate and sustained ceasefire resonates more strongly than ever. We have a narrow window of opportunity to avert further public health calamity. The commitment to stop the spread of polio must be replicated for all public health risks.

I would just like, on behalf of the polio community and the United Nations community, to dedicate our work in the coming days to our colleague, Mr. Aidan O'Leary, who was the Director of Polio Eradication at the World Health Organization (WHO). He worked for the United Nations in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Iraq and in Yemen and worked in the Balkans. He was the best of us — the

best of WHO, the best of UNICEF, the best of OCHA and the best of the United Nations, and we would like to dedicate our work in the coming days not only to saving the lives of the children of Gaza but to his memory.

The President: I thank Dr. Ryan for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and Deputy Director General Ryan for their briefings and also, once again, for the vital work of their staff.

The United Kingdom, alongside Switzerland, called this humanitarian meeting after yet another alarming warning from the United Nations. The situation in Gaza is intolerable and worsens with each day that passes. More than 100 hostages remain trapped in Gaza, subject to unimaginable horror. We reiterate our call for Hamas to immediately release them, and for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be granted humanitarian access.

Palestinian children, who are already suffering, are now facing the imminent threat of a major polio outbreak caused by the devastation of water and sanitation services, as well as widespread malnutrition and famine risk in Gaza. A 10-month-old baby has already been paralysed by the disease — the first such case for 25 years. That is a tragedy that could have been prevented.

As we heard, the United Nations plans to deliver vaccines as soon as this weekend. We strongly welcome Israel's agreement for pauses on military operations so that the World Health Organization and health agencies can deliver a safe and effective campaign. We now need to see that in action, and those pauses need to be long enough to deliver the 90 per cent coverage required. When the campaign starts and thousands of vulnerable and unaccompanied children gather at vaccination sites, they must all be protected.

Israel's ramping up of short-notice evacuation orders, including in areas that should provide safe refuge, is causing more chaos, again leaving Palestinians with no safe place to turn.

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security this week warned us that the United Nations also is running out of safe places for its staff. Personnel cannot deliver desperately needed aid when the Israel

Defense Forces (IDF) mass evacuation orders force them to uproot their homes and offices with just a few hours' notice. Israel must minimize evacuation orders and provide sufficient notice of at least 48 hours.

Despite repeated calls by the Council for deconfliction and the protection of aid operations, we continue to see appalling and unacceptable attacks on United Nations and aid convoys. The conflict already represents the deadliest by far for humanitarian personnel. Just this week, the United Nations confirmed that the IDF opened fire on a World Food Programme truck that had been fully coordinated with Israel and had United Nations workers inside. Israel must take immediate steps to protect aid workers and if its personnel are responsible for incidents, hold them accountable. All parties must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Sadly, it is not only in Gaza where we are witnessing violence. We are deeply concerned by rising levels of violence in the West Bank. More than 130 Palestinians, including 26 children, have been killed this month alone. We join the Secretary-General in calling for urgent de-escalation.

The only way to bring an end to the suffering is an immediate ceasefire. We fully support the ongoing efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar to reach an agreement on that which will get all the hostages out and significantly more aid in. We call on both Israel and Hamas to urgently take the deal on the table. We must then see irreversible steps towards a two-State solution, the best means of ensuring long-term peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): As my British colleague did, I would like to start by thanking the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Joyce Msuya, and the Executive Director of the World Health Organization Health Emergencies Programme, Michael Ryan, for their briefings and above all for the unwavering courage of their teams, who are working in the most difficult of circumstances, often risking their lives.

Switzerland, together with Great Britain, requested the convening of this meeting because the security conditions are not allowing humanitarians to do their job. That is unacceptable, especially as the humanitarian situation is worsening daily. Four months ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2730 (2024), which Switzerland was proud to draft. A new incident in Gaza

reminds us of the urgent relevance of that resolution. The World Food Programme was working on its mission to deliver food, essential to the survival of civilians, when its vehicles and personnel came under fire, as we just heard from Ms. Msuya.

We are also very concerned that evacuation orders — orders that, according to international law, should serve to protect the population and, in particular, should be implemented in adequate conditions in terms of hygiene, health, safety, shelter and nutrition — are having the opposite effect. Together with the hostilities, the Israeli army's orders to date have caused the displacement of almost 90 per cent of the inhabitants, who live on less than 11 per cent of the Gaza Strip in a small, overcrowded, polluted and dangerous area where essential services, including medical facilities, shelters and wells, are limited.

In addition to uprooting already exhausted families, including many children, those orders pose enormous obstacles to humanitarian activities. Humanitarian actors lose access to the premises and logistical infrastructure they need to operate, as was the case on Sunday night in Deir Al-Balah.

Switzerland calls on all parties to respect their obligations under international law and, in particular, to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and their activities. All parties have an obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all civilians in need. That therefore also applies to armed groups such as Hamas. Furthermore, Switzerland recalls that Israel, as the occupying Power, and as recalled by the International Court of Justice, is obliged to fulfil the humanitarian needs of the population.

As a result of the catastrophic conditions in Gaza, as we have heard, polio has resurfaced there. It is imperative that the vaccination campaign planned by the United Nations be carried out in complete safety for humanitarian personnel and civilians, in particular the 640,000 children under the age of 10 who must be inoculated from Saturday. Switzerland is supporting the vaccination campaign with funding in the amount of 1 million Swiss francs.

The Secretary-General has made it clear that the guns must fall silent to allow the United Nations to carry out the two necessary vaccination phases. The Council has unanimously demanded a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the hostages in its resolutions 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024). We support the mediation of Egypt,

Qatar and the United States. At the same time, we must reaffirm our demand for respect for international humanitarian law, under all circumstances and by all parties. Even in the absence of a ceasefire, humanitarian work must be allowed to continue.

Switzerland commends the work of the United Nations and its partners under those extremely difficult conditions. The Council must remain informed about the conduct of the vaccination campaign and, if necessary, be ready to act.

Switzerland is also very concerned about the escalation in the West Bank, which has reached a new dimension. We are observing a sharp escalation in Israeli operations, including air strikes in densely populated areas, such as Jenin and Tulkarm in recent days. That is also resulting in severe restrictions on movement, including those imposed on medical personnel. It is unacceptable that here too, basic services to the population are regularly cut off. We call on Israel to respect its obligations under international law. In particular, the use of force must meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality, and every individual's right to life and security of person must be respected.

In conclusion, respect for international law and Security Council resolutions is a *sine qua non* for de-escalation, including regional de-escalation, and a first step towards the establishment of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We reiterate our firm support for the negotiated two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine, of which Gaza is an integral part, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Msuya and Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization Ryan for their briefings.

Polio is a scourge of a disease — one that had nearly been eradicated through the dedicated efforts of agencies such as the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other global health partners. The return of confirmed polio cases in Gaza is a clear and present threat to the health of the most vulnerable Palestinian civilians, including children, who have suffered terribly since the conflict began over 10 months ago. There is no doubt as to the threat that polio represents to the region, and the importance of establishing the conditions needed to urgently implement a vaccination campaign throughout Gaza.

For that reason, the United States is grateful to the United Nations for its leadership and urges all parties to support a safe and successful campaign. We continue to support coordination between the humanitarian community and Israeli authorities to facilitate swift implementation of a vaccination campaign in Gaza. Secretary Blinken raised that during his recent visit to Israel. It is vital that the campaign be implemented without delay.

It is especially important for Israel to facilitate access for agencies carrying out the vaccination campaign and for it to ensure periods of calm and refrain from military operations during vaccination campaign periods. We urge Israel to avoid further evacuation orders during this period. The bottom line is that humanitarians on the ground, including United Nations agencies and other non-governmental organizations, must be provided the space and security conditions to distribute vaccines and inoculate the at-risk population and to do so safely. Children's lives depend on their success. The need is urgent.

The polio campaign is yet another example of humanitarians working under extraordinarily difficult circumstances to help the people of Gaza. We are grateful for their sacrifices and tireless work. And we will continue to insist on the need for their protection in Gaza and around the world.

Even as we press all parties to facilitate life-saving work, we must not ignore how Hamas's actions continue to put civilians, including humanitarian personnel and their families, at risk.

Separately, we are alarmed by yesterday's reports that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired repeatedly on a World Food Programme vehicle. Israel has said it is investigating that most recent incident, which their initial review has said was a result of a communication error between IDF units. We have urged them to immediately rectify the issues within their system that allowed that to happen. Yet, the simple fact is, almost 11 months into the conflict, incidents such as yesterday's remain all too common. We are also concerned by another incident in which the IDF fired towards a UNICEF vehicle. Those security incidents make the work of those organizations significantly harder. Those incidents should not happen. Israel must not only take ownership for its mistakes, but also take concrete actions to ensure the IDF does not fire on United Nations personnel again. Further, all attacks

and threatening rhetoric against the United Nations and humanitarian non-governmental organizations need to stop. The rhetoric has placed and continues to place humanitarian actors under increased risk both in Gaza and globally.

Today's briefings underscore the vital importance of finalizing a ceasefire with the release of hostages, as the Security Council called for in resolution 2735 (2024). The United States, in partnership with Qatar and Egypt, continues to engage the parties on a final deal, which would bring the hostages home and bring much-needed relief to the people of Gaza. A ceasefire hostage release agreement would also aid efforts to alleviate the public health crisis in Gaza, which extends beyond polio to outbreaks of cholera and suspected hepatitis A, all of which are avoidable.

The international community must also do its part. We reiterate our call on all Member States to contribute funds to support the live-saving work of humanitarian organizations in Gaza.

The level of human suffering in Gaza is immense, and Palestinian civilians, many of whom have been displaced multiple times, continue to bear the worst of catastrophic humanitarian conditions. But again, the best course to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian civilians and of Israelis awaiting the safe return of their family members, is to finalize and implement a ceasefire. The time is now.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the delegations of Switzerland and the United Kingdom for requesting this meeting and thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and Deputy Director-General Ryan for their briefings.

Over 10 months have passed since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, which has led to the death of more than 40,000 civilians and an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Despite the repeated calls by the international community for an end to the fighting, the multiple resolutions adopted by the Security Council in that regard and provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice, the situation has not seen any improvement. Rather, it continues to worsen.

In the past month alone, the conflict has taken the lives of more than 1,000 people in Gaza. Israel has issued 16 emergency evacuation orders. Schools and refugee camps that sheltered a large number of people were targeted in attacks. Hundreds of thousands of

people were forced to flee time and again, and yet they were unable to find a safe place to live. Israel continued to further suppress and restrict the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, frequently rejecting deliveries of supplies such as fuel. Recently, humanitarian agencies were compelled to evacuate from their centres and warehouses in Deir Al-Balah, causing further serious damage to the humanitarian system in Gaza.

The polio virus seriously threatens the health of children in Gaza. Vaccination is the most effective way to stem the spread of the virus and ensure the safety of children. The virus knows no borders. China supports the appeal by Secretary-General Guterres and urges Israel to guarantee secure conditions for and facilitate the vaccination work in a responsible manner for its own children and those of the region. We support the Council in making a strong appeal to that end to avoid further worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In the West Bank, Israel is continuing to violate international law and Council resolutions, its settlements are continuing to grow, and it is ramping up searches, arrests and raids against Palestinians. Since October, more than 620 Palestinians have lost their lives. Yesterday, the Israeli military launched a large-scale military operation targeting Tulkarm, Jenin and Tubas, among other places in the West Bank, which resulted in at least 10 deaths and many injuries. China strongly condemns such actions. Senior Israeli Government officials recently spoke of applying the same approach employed in Gaza to operations in the West Bank. We are shocked and seriously concerned about such extreme remarks, which defy global opinion. Gaza has now turned into hell on Earth. We must never allow the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza to happen in the West Bank, which would turn the West Bank into another hell on Earth. China opposes all rhetoric and actions that fuel tensions, condemns all attacks on civilians and calls on the parties concerned — Israel, in particular — to remain calm, exercise restraint and prevent further escalation.

The priority now is to fully implement the four Council resolutions on the situation in Gaza, promote an immediate and durable ceasefire and effectively ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Ceasefire negotiations cannot be indefinitely delayed, much less used as an excuse to continue committing atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank, in violation of international law. China urges Israel to immediately end all military

operations in Gaza, open all border crossings, stop blocking and restricting the activities of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations, cease its attacks on the West Bank and curb settler violence and impunity. Countries with significant influence on the parties concerned should demonstrate a sincere and responsible approach and take practical actions to promote the realization of a ceasefire. We support further Council action to promote the implementation of relevant resolutions, bring an early end to the fighting and ease the humanitarian catastrophe.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General, and Dr. Ryan, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) for their detailed briefings on the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

With more than 280 humanitarian workers killed since the deplorable Hamas attacks against Israel on 7 October, we are reminded, once again, that nowhere and no one in Gaza is safe — not United Nations staff, not civilians, not medical workers and certainly not children, who comprise half of Gaza's population and are now even at risk of polio.

In that regard, I would like to make three points.

First, we are seriously alarmed by ongoing threats against both civilians and United Nations and humanitarian personnel in Gaza, particularly in and around Deir Al-Balah, Gaza's most vital humanitarian hub since the destruction of the former safe zone in Rafah. Recent increased Israel Defense Forces operations there, including the ongoing targeting of schools sheltering families, have resulted in numerous civilian deaths and the forced displacement of tens of thousands into concentrated areas along the sea, with scant access to humanitarian needs. My delegation is deeply disturbed by the 27 August incident, in which a clearly marked World Food Programme (WFP) convoy was riddled with bullets, followed by the WFP's ensuing suspension of its operations in Gaza. We appeal to Israel and all parties to the conflict to allow United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers to do their job safely.

Secondly, the Republic of Korea is gravely concerned about the sharp increase in evacuation orders by Israel, including at least 16 issued in August alone, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. That not only compounds the suffering of a hungry, sick and exhausted population

subject to multiple displacements, but also — as Under-Secretary-General Michaud highlighted in his 27 August statement — imposes an unbearable threat to the safety and security of United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers. Such a risk also significantly impedes the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale in Gaza, where 500,000 people are facing catastrophic food insecurity levels.

Thirdly, we are extremely disturbed by the Gaza polio outbreak, which significantly threatens Palestinian children due to its highly contagious nature. In that regard, we strongly support the urgent vaccination efforts scheduled for next week, to be conducted by United Nations agencies, including the WHO. We call on all parties to let health workers fulfil their vital mission of protecting Gaza from a virus that has not seen an outbreak for 25 years.

The bleak humanitarian situation for the 2.3 million people in Gaza is simply intolerable. Council resolutions remain unimplemented and deconfliction mechanisms are being ignored. At the same time, the wider region's security hangs perilously on a knife's edge. The Republic of Korea therefore reiterates its urgent appeal to the parties to finally secure a long-overdue ceasefire agreement and to de-escalate growing tensions in the West Bank and beyond.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Msuya and Dr. Ryan for their instructive briefings this afternoon. Through you, Mr. President, I wish to reiterate Ecuador's support for the work of the United Nations and all its agencies.

The efforts made by United Nations personnel to alleviate the humanitarian situation of the civilian population in Gaza, despite all the difficulties, show that the Organization is valuable and necessary and that its work is irreplaceable, especially in times of crisis. We, the Member States of the United Nations, must cooperate with this Organization, our Organization, facilitate its work as much as possible and, at the very least, not hinder its work.

That is why what the Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Safety and Security, Gilles Michaud, said on 27 August is of great concern. Humanitarian personnel must be protected. The parties are obligated to respect the rules of international humanitarian law at all times and in all circumstances. Commitments under the Charter of the United Nations to ensure the security of United Nations premises must be honoured.

With regard to the health situation, I reiterate what I said last week: Ecuador supports the United Nations initiative to organize a massive vaccination campaign to protect the children of Gaza from polio. Inaction in the face of preventable diseases is unacceptable. It is urgent and critical that the parties provide all necessary security guarantees so that the campaign can start on the planned date and be conducted without interruption.

Likewise, I reiterate my country's support for the ongoing efforts to reach an agreement that would allow for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including the vaccination campaign. It is of paramount importance that such an agreement be reached without further delay. Since the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October, which Ecuador once again condemns, the violence has not stopped, and it is time to put an end to that dynamic.

I conclude by reiterating, as I have done on many occasions, my country's commitment to a peaceful, negotiated, definitive and just solution for the parties, with the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders and the relevant resolutions.

Ms. Persaud (Guyana): Let me begin by thanking the delegations of Switzerland and the United Kingdom for requesting this timely briefing. I also thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and World Health Organization (WHO) Deputy Director General Dr. Ryan for their critical updates on the situation in Gaza.

As illustrated again by our briefers, the humanitarian situation in Gaza, engendered by a man-made crisis of unprecedented proportions, becomes increasingly catastrophic with each passing day. The violations by the occupying Power continuously reach new levels in the face of the Security Council's inaction to stop the trampling of everything that the United Nations was built to achieve. History will judge us harshly if the Council does not act to save the Palestinian people from the scourge of the unending onslaught, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Guyana therefore appeals to fellow Council members for us to act collectively and urgently to bring a swift end to the hostilities in Gaza and halt the toll of death and destruction.

We remain deeply distressed by the conditions under which humanitarian actors, including United Nations personnel, are operating in Gaza. The statement issued on Tuesday by the United Nations Department of Safety

and Security sets out some of the challenges associated with the United Nations aid operations in Gaza, noting that the Organization "is operating at the uppermost periphery of tolerable risk". That was evident in the Israel Defense Forces shooting of a marked and deconflicted World Food Programme vehicle on Tuesday evening. Broadly speaking, it is the wanton disregard for, and the violations of, international humanitarian law that have allowed those incidents to continue.

We have also taken note of how the constant evacuation orders, sometimes with very little notice, are affecting humanitarian operations, including by shrinking the spaces in which they work and civilians dwell. On that latter point, Guyana notes, for example, that prior to 7 October 2023, there were 1,200 persons per square kilometre in Gaza and that number has currently risen to 30,000 to 40,000 persons.

One consequence of the constant evacuations and the shrinking space for civilians is that people have been forced to endure living conditions that are giving rise to disease. For example, polio has re-emerged in Gaza after 25 years. The WHO's collaborative efforts to vaccinate Gaza's children against the disease should be allowed to take their course in the interest of children throughout the region. As Mr. Philippe Lazzarini reminded us recently, polio will not distinguish between Palestinian and Israeli children. Delaying a humanitarian pause will only increase the risk of it spreading.

We cannot ignore the worrisome developments in the West Bank. We have taken careful note of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report of wide-scale Israeli operations, "including drones and ground forces in [some] governates" in the West Bank. The actions of the Israeli security forces patently undermine the quest for a two-State solution, contrary to resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly and aggravate the risks to peace and stability in the region. These actions contravene the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice, in which the Court pronounced itself on the illegality of the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and on how the occupation undermines and imperils the two-State solution. Against that backdrop, Guyana reiterates four appeals.

First, we call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. Since its first days, the incessant bombing campaign has exceeded anything that could be considered a proportional response. What we are

witnessing instead is an unprecedented and unrelenting war on innocent civilians. The urgency of reaching a ceasefire deal now cannot be overemphasized. On 10 June, the Council endorsed the three-phase ceasefire proposal (see resolution 2735 (2024) with the expectation that the parties would have shortly thereafter agreed to the proposal. With nothing forthcoming more than 10 weeks later, the Council must seriously consider how it could ensure an immediate ceasefire in the context of its own responsibility to protect innocent civilians from genocide.

Secondly, Guyana calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages taken captive on 7 October 2023 and of all Palestinians detained in Israeli jails without charge, some for years. Simultaneously, we call on the relevant parties to treat all hostages and detainees with dignity and respect.

Thirdly, Guyana stresses the critical need for adequate humanitarian access into Gaza. The civilian population is being crushed under the tremendous weight of needs existing in Gaza, while essential supplies, including food and medicine, are sitting in trucks outside of Gaza, wasting away owing to restrictions on access. We therefore call on the Israeli Government to prioritize the well-being of civilians in Gaza, not as some measure of goodwill, but as a legal and moral imperative.

Finally, Guyana underscores that justice and accountability are integral elements of any day-after discussions. The desire for justice is innate in every human being, and there must be accountability for the injustice experienced by every Palestinian, not just since 7 October 2023, but also in the decades preceding. A strong message must be sent to all violators of international law that their actions will not be clothed in impunity.

I conclude by urging every one of us around this table to consider how we can, individually and collectively, pave the path to peace for Palestinians and Israelis and for the entire Middle East, where civilians continue to be caught up in the throes of a war of neither their making nor their choosing.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I also want to thank the briefers, Ms. Msuya and Dr. Ryan.

A long time ago, we exhausted our vocabulary for describing the tragedy of Palestinians in Gaza. It is difficult to comprehend and accept that such suffering

of civilians, especially children, has, before our eyes, been met with impunity for almost 11 months and that we have not been successful in stopping it. And we are sitting here again at another Council meeting. What has changed since the previous briefing?

Given the scale of suffering, I could speak about record high numbers of persons killed, injured, maimed and displaced. Since our last meeting, a first case of polio has been confirmed. The life of 10-month-old Abdel Rahman and his family is likely changed forever. We would like to start by welcoming the efforts and work of the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in setting up two rounds of polio vaccination campaigns. Polio can be stopped, and we can prevent other young lives from being transformed. We joined the calls for days of tranquillity to allow for the safe and successful implementation of the vaccination campaigns. We also welcome efforts by the Israeli authorities in facilitating the campaigns.

As we were reminded today, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. And as we just heard from Dr. Ryan, several thousand patients are in need of evacuation. We repeat our call for full adherence to international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties. We call for the full implementation of the International Court of Justice's provisional measures and Security Council resolutions. We call for an immediate ceasefire. We call for all hostages to be released, and we call for humanitarian aid to be delivered at scale, while expressing our deep concern about the significant drop in aid recently.

Despite several disruptions, including major relocations and a dangerous operational environment, the United Nations and the broader humanitarian community continue their work. Two days ago, another United Nations vehicle was hit. We condemn that attack. Luckily, World Food Programme colleagues survived because they were in an armoured vehicle. That shows the importance of having access to appropriate security equipment, including communications equipment. It also shows the importance of a functioning system for deconfliction. This is not an isolated incident. The Council has not been silent on those two points, namely, the required security equipment and a functioning deconfliction mechanism. We issued a joint call on those points in February and, in April, demanded that the deficiencies be remediated. Timely information

should be shared with the Council on steps that have been taken to remedy those deficiencies. There must be accountability for such incidents. The rules of engagement and obligations must also be reinforced among troops, including respect for the United Nations, its mission, its work and its staff.

While we welcome the progress related to polio vaccination campaigns, we reiterate that more must be done. Civilians must be protected. New threats are looming on the horizon. This war must end. We call on both sides to continue to engage in and finalize ceasefire negotiations, and the time is now. Every additional day and any delays will be counted in civilian lives.

In conclusion, I also want to briefly touch on the current situation in the West Bank. We are appalled by the disproportionate use of force, the increase in apparent targeted and other summary killings, arbitrary arrests, unsanctioned settler violence and other human rights violations and abuses. The ongoing operations and any unnecessary or disproportionate use of force must cease immediately. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice is clear: Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible. Ideas about evacuating Palestinians are fuelling instability. We remind Israel that the appropriate legal frameworks must be applied and that human rights norms and standards applicable to law enforcement must be respected. More violence is not bringing Israel closer to safety and security or the international community closer to the two-State solution, which is strongly supported by all members of the Council.

Finally, we repeat our call for maximum restraint by all countries and actors in the region. This is not the moment to add more fuel to the fire.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We commend the United Kingdom and Switzerland for requesting this urgent meeting, and we thank the presidency for convening it. We are also grateful to Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Dr. Michael Ryan, Deputy Director-General and Executive Director of the Health Emergencies Programme at the World Health Organization, for their invaluable briefings to the Security Council.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East, in particular the occupied territories of Palestine, continues to pose grave risks to civilians. Those risks encompass violations of fundamental rights, including

access to food, health and protection. The civilian population faces an array of dire threats to their safety and well-being. According to reports leading up to 27 August, the military operations conducted by Israeli forces have resulted in the loss of more than 40,000 lives, with more than 93,000 civilians injured and more than 10,000 missing. The widespread nature of those attacks has left the civilian population with limited options for safe refuge and has significantly constrained the humanitarian operational space. Furthermore, the persistent activities of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank, coupled with the ongoing military operations in the Gaza Strip, have led to profound human suffering and undermine the prospects for peace and stability in the region. That situation underscores the urgency of international intervention.

The situation in Gaza presents extreme challenges for United Nations personnel and humanitarian workers, who operate in very high-risk conditions, with many facing direct attacks while trying to deliver essential services. The chaotic health-care situation is further exacerbated by attacks on medical infrastructure and limited access to vaccinations, which has created a high-risk environment for preventable diseases such as polio. In that regard, the hostilities must cease in order to facilitate the intensification of vaccination efforts and prevent a full-blown outbreak.

As the international community grapples with the challenges posed by the war in Gaza, it is imperative to advocate for the safety and well-being of civilians caught in the crossfire. Their rights must be upheld, and accountability for any violations must be pursued relentlessly. It is of paramount importance that all parties involved respect international humanitarian law and their commitments under the Charter of the United Nations and provide humanitarian relief in this catastrophic situation. Mozambique reiterates its unwavering stance, emphasizing the urgent need for a cessation of hostilities, which is a critical step towards achieving a humanitarian ceasefire. The Security Council bears a collective responsibility to call for de-escalation in the Gaza Strip conflict. The grave situation demands our urgent attention and concrete actions owing to the enormous challenges, harm and trauma experienced by civilians. Mediation efforts must therefore intensify to address the growing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

In conclusion, we call on all members of the Council to work collectively towards the establishment of peace and stability in this troubled region, prioritizing

the well-being of civilians caught in the midst of the conflict. We underscore the critical importance of pursuing a two-State solution as the foundation for lasting peace.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I also thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and Dr. Ryan for their briefings.

As we just heard, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is out of control, with ongoing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. More than 40,000 civilians, including 16,000 children, have been killed, while others remain unaccounted for. Credible reports suggest that the true number could be significantly higher. None of Gaza's 36 hospitals are fully operational owing to destruction, overcrowding and Israel's failure to ensure that adequate medical resources reach the Strip. Much of Gaza's population continues to suffer severe food insecurity, and too many are on the brink of starvation. More than 80 per cent of Gaza's educational facilities, including all 12 universities, have been damaged or destroyed. That includes United Nations schools sheltering displaced civilians, some of which are located inside designated safe zones. A significant proportion of all buildings in the enclave have reportedly been damaged or destroyed. Those include mosques and churches.

The suffering that we have witnessed over the past 11 months is a direct result of the continued military campaign. Civilians and objects essential to their survival are being actively targeted. United Nations and humanitarian staff are not spared. United Nations humanitarian operations are currently hanging by a thread. Since October 2023, approximately 280 United Nations and humanitarian workers have been killed. Such chilling statistics underline a failure to abide by international law and international humanitarian law. No humanitarian notification or deconfliction mechanism can function in such a context.

Equally alarming is the potential outbreak of a polio variant in Gaza, as we have just heard from Dr. Ryan. Malta fully supports the efforts by the World Health Organization and UNICEF to vaccinate 650,000 children under 10 years of age. Nonetheless, the lack of a comprehensive ceasefire and of assiduously observed security guarantees risks exposing children to unsafe health facilities.

We would be remiss not to mention the ongoing worrisome developments in the West Bank. The dire humanitarian situation, compounded by the ongoing

attacks on cities in the northern West Bank as part of Israel's operation, is of utmost concern. It is imperative that international human rights law and international humanitarian law are upheld at all times.

We have adopted four resolutions (resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024)) on this conflict since last October. Through them, we have called for the facilitation of humanitarian access, the protection of civilians and a permanent ceasefire. Despite reports of a ceasefire being close, the political support, armament and massacres continue. Without accountability, things will not change. However, there is a path out of this nightmare. That path begins with the full, immediate, and effective implementation of relevant Council resolutions and the orders of the International Court of Justice. Resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024) unequivocally demand that Israel allow unrestricted aid into Gaza, protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and agree to a ceasefire, with the aim of establishing a lasting peace. Israel must allow the provision of basic services and humanitarian aid.

In conclusion, we thank and pay tribute to all humanitarian agencies and aid workers for their tireless efforts in such dire conditions. We reiterate our unequivocal call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the urgent and unconditional release of all hostages in Gaza. No further delays, diversions or obfuscations can be tolerated. Only when they cease can we begin to address the root causes and secure a just and lasting peace for the people of Palestine and Israel.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Msuya and Dr. Ryan for their briefings.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate inexorably. It has become untenable. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are no longer able to continue their operations. The increasing number of evacuation orders is having disastrous consequences for the population and further hampering the work of humanitarian actors.

Now more than ever, it is imperative to guarantee full humanitarian access, by all possible means, so that the population can be rescued, as requested by resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) and as required by international humanitarian law. France condemns the Israeli strikes on a World Food Programme vehicle on 28 August, which led to the suspension of that organization's activities. Israel must implement

an effective deconfliction system via humanitarian pauses and grant all necessary authorizations to humanitarian programmes and agencies. The start of the polio vaccination campaign at the end of August is non-negotiable.

The unfolding humanitarian disaster reminds us daily that this war must stop. The role of the Council is to re-establish peace and security. The humanitarian crisis is a consequence of the fighting. Putting an end to the fighting is the only possible response. France supports the mediation efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar, and it calls upon the parties to make the necessary compromises in order to bring about a ceasefire, so that humanitarian aid can flow in on a massive scale and the hostages can be released.

In a context of extreme tension, France condemns any acts of provocation and any unilateral measures, both in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Israeli authorities have a responsibility to uphold the historic status quo at the holy sites, while respecting the specific role of Jordan.

France condemns the settlement policy, which is in contravention of international law. It calls upon Israel to take all necessary measures to stop the unacceptable settler attacks on the Palestinian population of the West Bank. France is alarmed by the consequences of Israel's operation in the north of the West Bank for the Palestinian population and civilian infrastructure. France reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Israel's security and its strongest condemnation of the terrorist attacks of 7 October. Rocket attacks against Israel must cease.

The current crisis is a reminder of the urgent need to implement the two-State solution, which is the only way to guarantee stability and security for all in the region. Failing that, the conflict will continue, and the Council will be indefinitely faced with a disaster like the one that we are witnessing today. France opposes any occupation of the Gaza Strip by Israel.

Faced with rising tensions in the Middle East, the Council must do all it can to avoid a regional conflagration. France is continuing its own efforts to that end, in coordination with its partners.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We note the initiative by our British and Swiss colleagues in the Security Council to convene today's meeting in order to discuss the security conditions

deteriorating by the day for United Nations personnel working in Gaza. We thank the representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization, Ms. Joyce Msuya and Mr. Michael Ryan, respectively, for their frank assessments of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

We are exceedingly concerned about the emergence of information that the United Nations could possibly cease its work in the Gaza Strip. We believe that the Security Council must spare no effort to prevent that from happening. And certain Israeli politicians have clearly shown an interest in that coming to pass. At the same time, as far as we can tell, humanitarian workers themselves are determined to continue to valiantly carry out their duty for the sake of those in need in Gaza. Humanitarian workers have essentially been trying singlehandedly to help the people in Gaza survive the unprecedented hardships caused by Israel's actions.

Whatever language we may use today to describe the catastrophic situation in the Palestinian enclave, in the nearly one year of escalation all the words that have been uttered have become mostly futile clichés and phrases. While Security Council members are holding this meeting here and uttering these words, in the 10 months of the confrontation, more than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 93,000 have been wounded. Consider those figures. They are equivalent to the population of a modestly sized city. That statistic becomes particularly tragic if we take into account the fact that most of the victims are entirely innocent women and children. And unfortunately, no glimmer of hope has emerged to date. Israel's military operation continues, killing more and more civilians with each passing day. From 23 to 26 August alone, the brutal hostilities claimed the lives of 170 Palestinians and wounded 390. Israel's evacuation orders — more than 16 orders have been already issued in August — have affected 89 per cent of Gaza's territory and approximately 90 per cent of its population. That in itself could lead to a complete halt to humanitarian operations in Gaza, even without the expulsion of humanitarian workers.

Even the United Nations humanitarian hub in Deir Al-Balah has also come under an evacuation order. That is precisely where, as we know, the United Nations Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, planned to establish her office back in May. That once again confirms that,

so far, efforts to launch a mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian aid remain a dead letter, at a time when the situation on the ground throughout Gaza is deteriorating catastrophically.

Humanitarians are working at constant risk to their lives, performing their heroic duty, and we pay tribute to their courage. Two days ago, a clearly marked United Nations vehicle was shelled by the Israeli military. Fortunately, the staff were unharmed. However, following that incident, the World Food Programme leadership, according to available information, has announced a temporary halt to its operations. If that is indeed true, the situation appears to be even more dire, as thousands of people will not receive the assistance they need.

Almost the entire population of the Gaza Strip has been forced to wander the enclave in search of any kind of shelter. However, as representatives of the United Nations humanitarian wing have repeatedly confirmed, there are no safe places in Gaza. Some 2 million people are trapped and being shelled. They have been enduring unthinkable suffering due to the lack of food, water, medicine and proper sanitation.

Outbreaks of infectious disease under such conditions have become a bitter reality. We are particularly concerned about reports that, for the first time in 25 years, polio has been detected among Palestinian children. Owing to Israel's military operation, in the first six months of the year, only 21,500 Palestinian children were inoculated, the lowest vaccination level in recent years. Meanwhile, the massive vaccination campaign announced by the United Nations is in peril. Despite the difficult situation, humanitarian personnel managed to deliver 1.2 million doses of vaccine to Gaza. However, the intensification of hostilities, the growing number of Israeli evacuation orders and restrictions on medical personnel entering the Strip have thwarted efforts to vaccinate hundreds of thousands of children in Gaza. We call on the international community to do everything possible to prevent the spread of polio in Gaza and to exert pressure on Israel to that end. At the same time, it is important that the need for polio vaccinations not overshadow the more important task of Security Council members, which is to achieve an open-ended and sustainable ceasefire.

The situation in the West Bank of the Jordan River is also deteriorating rapidly, with the Israeli air force intensifying its raids there. At least 17 Palestinians were

killed as the result of an Israel Defense Forces military operation in the towns of Jenin, Tubas and Tulkarm, involving 1,000 Israeli soldiers and the deployment of air assets. Since 7 October 2023, 669 people have died in the West Bank, including approximately 150 children.

We believe that the international community must continue to demand that Israel cease forced displacements and evacuations as well as attacks on humanitarian workers, followed by investigations to identify perpetrators. We should remember that in the course of the conflict, 286 humanitarian workers have been reportedly killed, mostly United Nations staff — 209 people. The majority of those United Nations staff were from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — 205 people. However, we still have no information on whether the perpetrators of those crimes have been brought to justice, and we do not even know whether their deaths have been investigated.

From the outset, we warned that all humanitarian resolutions, including resolution 2720 (2023), are doomed to remain dead letters as long as there is no unconditional and comprehensive ceasefire in the enclave. That is exactly what has happened. Humanitarian workers are simply not able to work while hostilities are ongoing. They cannot confront military personnel and therefore they cannot even defend themselves, let alone deliver on their mandate to provide humanitarian assistance. The Council has no moral right to demand that they sacrifice their lives while it does nothing to compel the parties to cease hostilities.

I would like to recall that Russia was the first country to introduce a draft Security Council resolution (S/2023/772) with such a demand, which we did on 16 October last year. However, one delegation, shielding its main ally in the Middle East, has spent 10 months, as we know, blocking any tangible steps by the Council in that direction. Consequently, it essentially compels all Council members to become complicit in the collective punishment of the Palestinians.

Precisely one week ago, we heard in this Chamber (see S/PV.9711) more mendacious assurances from the Permanent Representative of the United States that a ceasefire deal was supposedly about to be concluded and that we all should exert pressure on Hamas for it to materialize. However, it turned out — which no longer surprises anyone — that those calls were as far from

reality, as was the United States-sponsored resolution on Gaza adopted on 10 June to support the so-called Biden plan (resolution 2735 (2024)). Russia abstained at that time, while the rest of the Council members signed up to that deliberately misleading text, which asserted that Israel allegedly agreed to the proposed terms of the deal. Moreover, in all that time, the United States never bothered to brief the Council about the parameters of the deal. It only demanded that the Security Council unconditionally approve a pig in a poke and exert pressure on Hamas.

As it turned out, Israel did not agree to that deal then, nor has it agreed now to end its operation. Instead, it continues to set out further demands, which, among other things, threaten to undermine the entire system of agreements in the region. Far from putting the Israelis in their place, our American colleagues are unfortunately playing along by modifying the parameters of the ceasefire in Gaza to the benefit of West Jerusalem. I remind members that the Security Council did not consent to any reformatting of the parameters of the agreements set forth in resolution 2735 (2024).

As a result, even the first phase of de-escalation, as set out in resolution 2735 (2024), cannot happen in any form, not to mention the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and the restoration of the infrastructure of the enclave. Therefore, that document, which was initially based on misleading claims about Israeli consent, has become irrelevant. Now, we need to think about what tangible steps the Council can take to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza, irrespective of whether Israel wants it or not, and to ensure its implementation. The Council has all the necessary tools at its disposal to reach that goal — what is needed now is the political will to use those tools. Otherwise, the Council will play the unenviable role of an extra on the Middle East geopolitical stage, orchestrated by Washington, which is trying its hardest to supplant a full-fledged solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a destructive “deal of the century” under its sole sponsorship. As we all know, it was precisely the wish of the United States to monopolize the Middle East peace process and reshape it to Israel’s liking that led to the tragic events that we are witnessing today.

We call upon the Council to act in accordance with its mandate and not to take the lead of the United States and Israel. The paramount objective is to bring about a prompt and sustained end to the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip, which involves a monitoring

mechanism under the mandate of the Council and — if necessary — enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the ceasefire. That will help in the future relaunch the process aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement on the Palestinian issue on an internationally recognized basis with a view to establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel.

Every day that we do not take action while awaiting the results of the much-advertised bilateral diplomacy on the ground comes at the cost of the lives of dozens, even hundreds, of Palestinian civilians. There will be no miracles. The situation can be resolved only through immediate decisive action by the international community, through the Security Council. We stand ready to cooperate with all parties who share and embrace those approaches.

Mr. Gaouaoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Joyce Msuya and Dr. Michael Ryan for their comprehensive briefings. Those two briefings, similar to other reports, unfortunately, reflect the tragic reality of the inability of the international community to ensure respect for the rule of law in the occupied Palestinian territories and undoubtedly show the scale of barbarism and brutality that the Palestinians are subjected to as a result of an occupation that is breaking all the rules and violating all the norms.

Algeria underscores that the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories can be addressed effectively only with a ceasefire. We therefore call once again for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and for the Israeli occupier to be held responsible for its crimes and systemic and blatant violations of international humanitarian law, including impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance and targeting humanitarian workers. Those are not isolated incidents or the mistakes of a few individuals, but rather a policy adopted by the Israeli occupier to kill any hope in the hearts of Palestinians, to humiliate them and to undermine public order in Gaza.

At a time when 96 per cent of the residents of Gaza are facing the risk of famine and when more than 50,000 children need to be treated for malnutrition, the Israeli occupier is issuing an evacuation order in Deir Al-Balah. That is the sixteenth evacuation order issued during the current month of August, during which 260,000 people have been displaced from their land, all

of whom had been displaced several times previously. However, this time they are being evacuated and displaced from an area that is considered a centre for humanitarian operations. That shows that the Israeli occupier does not care about the fate of Palestinians, humanitarian workers or United Nations personnel. The forced displacement and targeting of humanitarian workers, at least 297 of whom have been killed in Gaza so far, are full-fledged war crimes. We must all work to ensure their perpetrators are held accountable. Humanitarian workers are not obligated to risk their lives to provide assistance to those in need, and it is our duty to ensure their protection and enable them to carry out their noble tasks without fear or threat.

The campaign to vaccinate the children of Gaza against polio will soon begin. That disease had been eradicated in the Gaza Strip over 25 years ago, but the Israeli destruction machine caused its return, just as it caused the collapse of the health system in Gaza through its deliberate targeting of hospitals and health-care teams. We must therefore sound the alarm, given the likelihood of the spread of diseases and epidemics, including cholera, especially as areas in Gaza are awash in sewage and as solid waste is piling up as a result of the lack of basic services since the beginning of the Israeli aggression. We must not forget that it was the Israeli aggression that led to the threat of such diseases spreading to Gaza, and as the occupying Power, Israel has the responsibility for ensuring the safety of those participating in the vaccination campaign and the campaign's success. We warn against any obstruction or targeting of those participating in the campaign.

In that regard, my country would like to thank UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for their role in organizing that operation and for providing vaccinations to more than 640,500 Palestinian children. We acknowledge the difficult circumstances under which their staff are working, and we commend their determination to carry out their tasks despite all the challenges. My country also emphasizes the vital role of UNRWA in guaranteeing the success of the vaccination campaign, as it is participating in all the phases of that operation. It is expected that UNRWA will be able to vaccinate 40 per cent of the children in Gaza.

As the backbone of humanitarian work in Gaza, UNRWA cannot be replaced, even though some are trying to bypass the Agency or to minimize its role.

More than 1,000 UNRWA employees are participating in the vaccination campaign. However, that important effort requires a ceasefire. De-escalation mechanisms are ineffective and not working in Gaza. We therefore stress the importance of achieving an immediate ceasefire and enabling humanitarian workers to carry out their tasks. The vaccination campaign must be successful, and we must ensure the necessary conditions for its success.

In conclusion, the Security Council has the obligation to protect Palestinians, to put an end to the oppression of the Israeli occupation and to find a lasting and just solution to the Palestinian question. The purpose of the genocide in Gaza, the escalation in the West Bank and the continued desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque by the occupation authorities is to eliminate the possibility of establishing a Palestinian State. Therefore, the international community, and in particular the Security Council, must respond by taking practical and effective steps to guarantee the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. That is the only way to ensure a just and permanent peace in the region.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): First of all, I thank the delegations of the United Kingdom and Switzerland for proposing this timely meeting. I also express my gratitude to Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr. Ryan for their sobering updates.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is beyond description. Repeated evacuation orders have left Palestinians crammed into unliveable conditions, deprived of basic essentials and dignity. The so-called safe zones are nothing of the sort.

Humanitarian aid workers and United Nations personnel must be protected at all times. We need to stress that point, especially when we see that vaccination operations are starting. Yet, they are being exposed to intolerable risks. It is totally unacceptable that United Nations aid vehicles in Gaza continue to be fired upon.

Japan deplors the fact that a World Food Programme (WFP) vehicle carrying humanitarian cargo to central Gaza was struck by gunfire earlier this week. That incident has led to the suspension of WFP's vital operations. Clearly, deconfliction mechanisms are still woefully insufficient. We are also deeply concerned that the Israel Defense Forces recently gave just a few hours' notice to more than 200 United Nations personnel to move out of Deir Al-Balah, thus impairing a crucial humanitarian hub at a critical juncture.

Japan welcomes the news today of an agreement to a series of short-term pauses in the fighting in order to allow for the vaccination of Gaza's population against polio. All actors must work towards securing the safe and timely delivery of vaccines, especially to children. Yet the start of vaccination does not change the fact that an immediate and permanent ceasefire and massive humanitarian aid are absolutely necessary. We strongly support the joint statement issued earlier this month by the leaders of the United States, Egypt and Qatar and the diplomatic efforts made by those three countries. We call on all parties, especially Hamas, to finally conclude a deal in line with resolution 2735 (2024). Failure to do so would prolong the agony of all the people of Gaza, including the hostages.

Failure to do reach a deal also risks further instability, as seen by the Israeli operation in the West Bank that began on Wednesday and the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hizbullah across the Blue Line over the weekend. We urge all parties, especially those in the region, to exercise maximum restraint. Again, we reiterate that a ceasefire must happen now in order to achieve the release of hostages, the delivery of humanitarian aid at scale and the calming down of the situation in Gaza and beyond.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Sierra Leone.

I thank the United Kingdom and Switzerland for requesting this meeting. I also thank Ms. Joyce Msuya, Acting Under-Secretary-General, and Dr. Mike Ryan, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization, for their valuable and sobering briefings in a context marked by uncertainty and rapid changes in the situation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Recent reports from the occupied Palestinian territory convey a high sense of fear and desperation — not only among the Palestinians but also among humanitarian personnel, who for the past 11 months have been operating under very challenging conditions at great risk to their safety and security.

We are deeply concerned about the reported incidents in the West Bank, which continues to be a prime target for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF's massive military operation yesterday reportedly claimed more than 10 civilian lives and left many injured in Tulkarm camp and other locations.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, and the operations of the United Nations and other humanitarian personnel are becoming even more challenging. The latest evacuation notice issued by the IDF to the United Nations on 25 August, ordering the evacuation of about 200 personnel from their offices and residents in Deir Al-Balah, a place referred to as a crucial humanitarian hub, has created widespread fear and panic. It reportedly impacts 15 United Nations and non-governmental organization premises, as well as four United Nations warehouses.

As briefed by Dr. Ryan and as rightly stated by the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, such actions are especially concerning at this point, with the humanitarian community set to roll out two rounds of massive polio vaccine campaigns across the Gaza Strip for the more than 640,000 children at risk of being infected with variant type 2 poliovirus.

In addition, as briefed by Acting Under-Secretary-General Msuya and as indicated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 16 evacuation orders have been issued in August alone, directly affecting approximately 12 per cent of Gaza's population. In total, since 7 October 2023 to date, 88.5 per cent of the Gaza Strip has been placed under evacuation orders and, for most areas in Gaza, that has happened multiple times.

Persistent hostilities and insecurity continue to aggravate human suffering, create social unrest and increase trauma, regional instability and global tensions — with dire consequences for civilians, including women and children, especially the sick, pregnant women, lactating mothers and their babies.

The destructive effect of this prolonged conflict on critical civilian infrastructure, particularly hospitals and medical centres, as well as energy, water and sewage facilities, coupled with deliberate human-made administrative and physical barriers and obstructions, is making humanitarian interventions increasingly difficult.

As stated by Special Coordinator Tor Wennesland in last week's briefing,

“[i]f those unacceptable conditions are allowed to prevail, humanitarian operations in Gaza will continue to fall short of meeting the massive needs of the population.” (S/PV.9711, p.2)

This is now a reality that needs to be corrected immediately.

In view of the foregoing, Sierra Leone would like to emphasize several points.

First, we draw the attention of the parties to the conflict to paragraph 13 of resolution 2720 (2023), which

“[d]emands that all parties to the conflict take all appropriate steps to ensure the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel, those of its specialized agencies, and all other personnel engaged in humanitarian relief activities consistent with international humanitarian law, without prejudice to their freedom of movement and access, stresses the need not to hinder these efforts, and recalls that humanitarian relief personnel must be respected and protected”.

We therefore condemn the reported IDF attack on a World Food Programme convoy in the Gaza Strip and repeat the need for the establishment of a functioning deconfliction mechanisms.

Secondly, Sierra Leone strongly supports the appeal by the Secretary-General and humanitarian agencies for an immediate humanitarian pause that will allow for the safe, unhindered and uninterrupted administration of the two rounds of the polio vaccines. We also reject all forms of disinformation and misinformation about the potency of the vaccines. Such messaging poses a significant threat to public health and undermines global vaccination efforts.

Thirdly, we condemn Israel's military operations in the West Bank, particularly since the International Court of Justice has unambiguously declared that Israel's ongoing occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories is unlawful.

We remain unwavering in our commitment to ongoing diplomatic efforts, with the hope that the commitment being exhibited by the mediators — Egypt, Qatar and the United States — will soon help address the unresolved differences and ultimately lead to a deal that will ensure a permanent ceasefire, the release of hostages and unhindered humanitarian assistance.

Let me conclude by reminding the parties to the conflict to unreservedly adhere to their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We also stress the imperative for

accountability. Sierra Leone pledges its full support for all meaningful actions geared towards addressing the immediate and long-term causes of this conflict in a manner that sets the stage for a political horizon of a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, security and stability.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): My apologies for taking the floor once again, but I do need to respond to the remarks made by the representative of the Russian Federation.

Our Russian colleague's long-winded statement contained little but the usual politicization of this tragic conflict in Gaza. He rambled on with his usual anti-United States rhetoric, sounding like the representative of a bitter, angry, attention-seeking State, which, by the way, is in the midst of a war of aggression against the people of Ukraine, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations.

To be very frank, his country contributes nothing to resolving the conflict in Gaza and seems to not fully understand its complications. Instead, he demeans the work of the United States, Qatar and Egypt, which are making valiant efforts to end this conflict. So, while he and his Government continue the empty anti-United States diatribe, we and our Egyptian and Qatari partners will work to bring about a true end to the extremely tragic war in Gaza and bring the hostages home.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have to respond to my United States colleague's nervous breakdown.

We are of course accustomed to the United States always trying to lay the blame on others. I would, however, like him to provide us with details about the basis for his assertion that the Russian Federation has done nothing to prevent and end the conflict in Gaza.

I would like to recall that, as early as 16 October 2023, the Russian Federation tabled a draft resolution containing a demand for an immediate ceasefire. On 18 October 2023, his delegation vetoed that demand

for the first time. In total the United States delegation cast five vetoes. A total of 40,000 civilians, five vetoes — that is the tangible cost of what he is doing.

He claims to have been conducting fruitful negotiations to secure a deal between Hamas and Israel. He has indeed been conducting negotiations but they have been entirely fruitless. Since then, another 3,000 Palestinians have been killed. That is the exact cost — the cost of the United States representative's words and procrastination. He might instead perhaps at least go to the trouble of explaining in this Chamber what are the amendments to the deal with Hamas that the United States is proposing — amendments to accommodate Israel and about which we know nothing. We have repeatedly demanded that he provide that information, as resolution 2735 (2024) contains very concrete parameters that we must not overstep. All of this time he has been misleading the Council. Could he kindly answer my question?

The President: The representative of the United States of America has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, I apologize once again.

My Russian colleague — he or his Permanent Representative — has been in the Chamber in all of those discussions. He knows exactly what our positions were with regard to each of the resolutions and what we insisted on and what we thought was really going to be necessary to actually make progress in trying to bring an end to the war. I do not need to sit here and explain to him why the United States did what it did with regard to those resolutions. He knows quite well, and I think everybody in this room does, because we have been very clear about that.

In terms of what we are trying to do on the ground with our Egyptian and Qatari partners is to try to take that framework that was agreed by Israel and, from what we understand, by Hamas, and to try to make sure that we can get full implementation of it. Implementation is the issue here. The framework is there. Implementation

is the issue, and Hamas has changed its views a great many times on some of the steps that were previously agreed. What we are trying to do is effectively fill those gaps and work with the parties to do that.

He can sit here and criticize the United States for all the steps it has and has not taken, but we have been committed from the beginning and have done more, frankly, than his Government has done to try to end the war. And we will continue to work. He is more than welcome to sit there and use another opportunity — as he does on every occasion — to attack the United States for this or for that. It is his right to do so. But we are going to do the serious work of trying to end the conflict and not sit here and start blaming the world for what is going on. It is a very deep, challenging and long-standing conflict, and we are working, and have worked, harder than his Government has at any point to try to end the overall conflict. My recommendation to him and his Government would be: if they are going to contribute something positively, then they should contribute it. If not, they should be quiet.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to tell my distinguished American colleague to keep his recommendations to me and my Government to himself and finally do what the United States should be doing, namely not interfering with the Security Council's efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Everyone in the Chamber is perfectly aware of the fact that it is the United States that bears the primary responsibility for what is now happening in Gaza. A total of 40,000 civilian deaths are not just an amorphous figure: they represent concrete human tragedies. If my other colleagues do not have the courage to say that to his face, then I have no problem doing so. He will have to continue to live with that.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.