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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Žbogar	(Slovenia)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Kanu
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to our colleague His Excellency Mr. Michael Imran Kanu, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Sierra Leone, for his service as President of the Council for the month of August. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Kanu and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month. The Council engaged in several key discussions while at the same time sailing smoothly through the month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

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

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Dr. Efrat Bron-Harlev, Director of Schneider Children's Medical Center; and Ms. Yuli Novak, Israeli human rights activist and Executive Director of B'Tselem.

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

I would like to remind everyone that this is an official meeting of the Security Council. Being fully aware that today's briefing is emotionally not an easy one for anyone in the room, I would like to particularly remind all participants and speakers at today's

discussion to engage in this meeting with the utmost respect and to observe the appropriate standards of tone, wording and context in their remarks.

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: Nearly a year has passed since the horrific attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Israel — the single deadliest attack in the country's history. More than 1,250 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed, and approximately 250 individuals were abducted and taken into Gaza.

A few days ago, we learned the heartbreaking news of the killing of six Israeli hostages, whose bodies were recovered by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved families. I met the loved ones of several hostages in November 2023 in Jerusalem, including the parents of Hersh Goldberg-Polin. I watched the shocking and heartbreaking video footage of his capture — images I will never forget. According to the Israeli Government, the hostages had been shot multiple times at close range. They were killed by Hamas shortly before Israeli soldiers were able to reach them inside a tunnel in Rafah. Following the recovery of the bodies, Hamas announced that militants guarding hostages in the buildings and tunnels of Gaza had new instructions to kill hostages before they could be recovered alive by Israeli forces. At least 101 hostages are still held in Gaza. They are still denied humanitarian visits. Accounts of released hostages and other reports indicate that they are likely being held in horrific conditions, with some being subject to violence, including sexual violence and other forms of abuse.

I echo the words of the Secretary-General once again: all hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. For as long as they are held, in accordance with international legal obligations, they must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

We need an immediate ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages and a massive scale-up of humanitarian aid to Gaza. I welcome the continued efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the United States of America in that regard. Recent meetings in Doha and Cairo attempted to bridge gaps, but major differences persist. More must be done to reach a deal without further delay. The United Nations remains committed to supporting all efforts to that end.

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground looks grim. Israeli military operations continue across Gaza, and the number of fatalities tragically keeps increasing. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, since 7 October approximately 41,000 Palestinians have been killed, a majority of whom were reportedly women and children. We continue to witness the mass displacement of thousands of Palestinian families, most of them unable to access medical services, water and sanitation. Many families have been displaced several times. Nowhere is safe in Gaza.

At the same time, the indiscriminate launching of rockets by Hamas and other armed groups towards population centres in Israel also continues. Civilian objects in Gaza, including infrastructure, are also reportedly being used to shield fighters and military objectives, endangering the lives of civilians in and around them. Civilians should not and must not be used as human shields.

Humanitarian access is tenuous at best, jeopardized by unsafe conditions, including a complete breakdown of law and order throughout Gaza. The 27 August security incident involving a World Food Programme humanitarian convoy forced the agency to temporarily suspend the movement of its staff. My colleague, Director Wosornu from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, will shortly brief the Council further on the catastrophic humanitarian situation and the agonizing conditions faced by humanitarian workers.

Also, the Secretary-General has been following closely the polio immunization campaign currently under way in Gaza. The images of young children receiving their vaccinations amid rubble and utter ruin are both moving and distressing. The polio pauses are a rare ray of hope and humanity amid the horror in Gaza. I note that the arrangements established between United Nations agencies and the IDF to pause military activity in the designated vaccination areas have thus far been respected. Like the Secretary-General, I commend all those involved in that undertaking, especially our extraordinary humanitarian colleagues leading the campaign.

While we continue to focus on ending the killing and destruction in Gaza, we cannot lose sight of the alarming situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. That includes Israeli military operations, settler attacks and armed Palestinian violence against Israelis. Most recently, on 28 August, Israel launched

large-scale military operations against alleged terrorist cells in the Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas governorates. The operations also involved the use of air strikes. Those intensive and week-long operations resulted in clashes with armed Palestinians, civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. The operations were launched amid an uptick in attacks and clashes throughout the occupied West Bank, including in the Hebron area, with two car bombs near Israeli settlements the night of 30 August, the killing of three Israeli police officers in their car the following day and a subsequent Israeli military operation in the area. Overall, since 7 October, approximately 630 Palestinians and 15 Israelis have been killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. All perpetrators of violence — Israeli or Palestinian — must be held accountable.

Recent dangerous and provocative acts and statements are further inflaming the situation. Statements by Palestinian armed groups calling for further violence and attacks against Israelis are unacceptable and must cease. The recent inflammatory acts and statements by an Israeli minister at the holy sites in Jerusalem add to an already explosive situation in the occupied West Bank. The status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem must be respected and upheld, recognizing the special and historic role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

With every passing day, we get farther away from the objective of ending the occupation and achieving a viable two-State solution. We remain convinced that durable peace will only be achieved when Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State live side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. It is our responsibility to do all we can to support the parties in reaching that objective.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Wosornu.

Ms. Wosornu: I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to update the Security Council, alongside Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, following our briefing last week (see S/PV.9715).

The most recent developments in Gaza and the West Bank compel us to reaffirm, yet again, the equal value of every human life. The aim of international

humanitarian law is to limit the consequences of war by setting minimum standards of conduct to protect and meet the needs of those who are not fighting — the basic requirements of humanity. Yet suffering and devastation show that there has been almost no limit to the inhumanity unfolding before our eyes.

There are no winners in this war. Instead, it is marked by loss and agony, with civilians bearing the heaviest burden. As Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo has just noted, we see that in the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, when more than 1,000 people were killed, scores of children included. We see that in the recent killings of six hostages. Again, as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo has said, an estimated 101 Israeli and foreign nationals remain hostage in Gaza, along with the remains of those declared dead. We are alarmed by the treatment and conditions of the remaining hostages and the refusal to allow visits or assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

We also have grave concerns about the injury and death toll among Palestinians in Gaza — more than 40,000 people killed and 93,000 people injured, and more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. Much of that death and devastation is the result of the use of heavy weapons in densely populated areas, including in camps, shelters and areas to which civilians have been told to evacuate.

The brutality of this conflict seems to know no limits. We see that in the many attacks harming humanitarian workers: 295 humanitarian workers have been killed since 7 October 2023. We also see that in the attacks on humanitarian assets: since January, United Nations vehicles have been directly hit in more than a dozen separate incidents, even though notifications were issued regarding their movements. Attacks hitting humanitarian personnel and obstructing their movement are further limiting the delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid. As noted last week, the World Food Programme temporarily suspended staff movements following an attack that hit one of its convoys on 28 August. We see it in the reports of ill-treatment, including torture and sexual violence, of thousands of Palestinians taken into detention by Israeli forces in Gaza and the West Bank. We see that in the parties' reported use of human shields and the embedding of military presence in populated areas.

The medical system in Gaza has been decimated, leaving people, including pregnant and breastfeeding women and small children, without critical care. A total of 19 of Gaza's 36 hospitals — more than half — are out of service. As noted many times before, the remaining hospitals are barely functioning, overwhelmed by patients amid shortages of fuel and medical supplies.

Water infrastructure has been severely hampered and damaged, reducing the water supply to just a quarter of what it was before October 2023. Food sources and production facilities have been destroyed. Food delivery remains severely hampered by ongoing fighting, damaged roads and barriers to the entry and movement of humanitarian supplies. Approximately 96 per cent of the population continue to face high levels of acute food insecurity, with nearly half a million people facing catastrophic hunger. Vital humanitarian operations have been crippled, with growing denials of humanitarian missions and movements within Gaza, which is only causing suffering to compound further. At the same time, repeated evacuation orders leave civilians exposed to the dangers of hostilities and deprived of the essentials to survive. There is no safe place for civilians in Gaza. They must be allowed to seek protection.

It does not have to be that way. Indeed, over the past few days, there have been signs that humanitarian objectives can inspire positive steps. We welcome the local humanitarian pauses, which have enabled the launch of the emergency polio vaccination campaign, as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo highlighted, and recognize the colossal efforts of health actors to carry out the campaign in a very challenging environment. The Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator met with representative of the highest levels of the Government of Israel yesterday on humanitarian concerns, including the importance of the polio campaign.

According to the World Health Organization, more than 187,000 children under the age of 10 have been vaccinated in the first phase of the campaign, towards the goal of reaching more than 640,000 children in the coming period. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is playing a vital role, including with more than 200 teams operating in its clinics and health points.

We also welcome the repair of the main water line between Israel and Khan Younis by local partners

in cooperation with UNICEF. While the water and sanitation situation in Gaza remains dire, the repair has restored water service in several areas, including Al-Mawasi, where hundreds of thousands of displaced people endure unbearable conditions.

Despite all the challenges, we remain on the ground in Al-Mawasi and across Gaza, providing essential assistance, including food and shelter, and protection services, as best we can. Food rations are being distributed, albeit at reduced levels. Owing to the lack of supplies, wheat flour is excluded from the ration, as it is prioritized for the 14 bakeries supported by humanitarian actors. Tents are also being distributed, though they are, of course, insufficient to match the needs of repeatedly displaced families, especially with the approaching cold and rainy weather.

Allow me to reiterate our concern from last week — we remain very alarmed by the human toll of intensified Israeli military operations in the West Bank. On the night of 27 and 28 August, Israeli forces launched the largest military operation in decades in the northern West Bank, against the backdrop of increased casualties, settler violence, forced displacement and movement restrictions. It has now been a week, and that operation is still ongoing. Humanitarian organizations assessed needs in Tulkarm and are responding, but were denied access by Israeli forces for an assessment in Jenin.

While access denials have limited our ability to fully assess the humanitarian impact, we can confirm that more than two dozen Palestinians have been killed over the past week, hundreds of families have been displaced, and there has been widescale damage to basic infrastructure and private property from airstrikes, military bulldozers, exchanges of fire and explosive detonations. I recall that any use of force in the West Bank must comply with international human rights law and the standards governing law enforcement. Tactics typically used during hostilities in armed conflict are inconsistent with those standards and raise concerns of excessive use of force.

Respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is not optional. I reiterate that hostages must be released, civilians must be protected, and their essential needs must be met. The Council — and all Member States — must use their influence to ensure compliance, including by exerting diplomatic and other pressure and cooperating

in pursuing accountability. We once again appeal to Council members and all Member States to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities and a sustained ceasefire in Gaza and to de-escalate the situation in the West Bank. Resolutions passed by the Council promised an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. They also called for the release of hostages. Yet, months later, the violence continues, thousands more have been killed, and hostages remain separated from their families. It is time for the Council to turn its promises into reality and end the suffering.

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

I now give the floor to Dr. Bron-Harlev.

Dr. Bron-Harlev: My name is Efrat Bron Harlev. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Schneider Children's Medical Centre of Israel and a paediatric intensive care physician. I am also a mother of four boys. On 7 October 2023, less than a year ago, our lives changed. By 7 a.m., I was already at the hospital, under alarms, getting ready to move approximately 200 children hospitalized at Schneider's to sheltered areas, children who come from all over Israel, and outside of Israel, to receive the best medical care we can give.

Since the opening of our hospital, 32 years ago, we have had a mission, and that is to treat children, any children, because children are above and beyond everything — above and beyond religions, cultures, genders and nationality. Children are above and beyond, and children are our future.

Therefore, on that morning, we were all in a hurry to get all of them, and their parents, to safer areas at the hospital, and to be prepared to receive injured children. After a few hours, and even a little more, I understood that we were not going to receive any children. I understood that a few dozen children who were wounded were treated in the southern hospitals, but I also understood that many children, of all ages — babies, toddlers, children — were butchered in their houses — butchered, shot, burned, choked — butchered.

Then it took another day or two to understand that not only adults were kidnapped. Out of the 253, 38 were children. The youngest — Kfir Bibas — still now in Gaza, was then only 8 months old. From the minute that we understood that children had been kidnapped, we took a decision to prepare for their return to Israel, their return home. We are a very high-level, state-of-

the-art paediatric hospital. We have all the necessary knowledge to treat children in extreme situations but we never imagined and never thought that we would have to prepare to treat 3, 4, 5, 8 or 14-year-old children who would come back from captivity. We searched for literature and for some previous knowledge, but none was found. We created new protocols, which we knew would have to be very flexible and changeable when we saw, heard or examined the children once they returned.

It took 50 days and more, 50 days in which young children were kept in captivity and kept in complete silence. They were not allowed to cry, not allowed to laugh, not even allowed to stand up. They hardly ate, kept every bite of bread, and were moved from place to place in the middle of the night, horrified. When they arrived, they did not look like children. They looked like shadows of children with no impressions on their faces. They were not happy; they were not crying. They were mostly very, very silent. They had questions such as: are we allowed to look out the window? May I step out of bed? Are we safe here? We were repeatedly asked these questions.

One girl, 14-year-old Gali, was kept almost alone for most of the time in Gaza and told by the terrorists who were holding her that Israel was no more, that nobody was looking for her anymore and that nobody loved her — at 14 years old. Sharon Kunio was kidnapped with her husband, David, who is still now in Gaza. They were kidnapped with their three-year-old twin girls, Emma and Yuli, one of whom was taken away from them for two weeks — a three-year-old girl on her own in Gaza. Only after two weeks, while she was burning with fever, was she reunited with her parents in captivity. When they returned — skinny, scared and silent — it took them two days to get out of their rooms. Now it is already nine months since their return, and they definitely are not back to their normal lives. They are still waking up terrified, in the middle of the night, still talking about their terrible memories and still waiting for their father, David.

At Schneider, we received 19 children, six mothers and one grandmother who had all been in captivity. All of the children had experienced unimaginable, horrific events when their closest relatives had been murdered or taken with them into captivity. Children are innocent bystanders in any war. Sadly, children are known to be unintentionally hurt in war as innocent bystanders. That should always be avoided. It should never happen, but unintentional is very different than intentional. I

simply cannot understand and cannot bear the thought that someone — a man, a woman, anyone — could intentionally murder and capture children, lock them up and physically and mentally torture them, on purpose, intentionally.

I am here today as an Israeli paediatric physician and the head of one of the leading paediatric centres in the world to tell Council members that no child should ever go through what the children and civilians of Israel went through on 7 October 2023. I need Council members to hear it, understand it and help us to bring back the children who have not yet returned and bring all of those who are held in captivity back to their families in Israel. I need Council members to help all of us make sure that never again will such intentional atrocities happen to children.

The President: I thank Dr. Bron-Harlev for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Novak.

Ms. Novak: It is an honour to address the Security Council today, and I thank the Slovenian presidency for the invitation to talk to the Council about the state of human rights in Israel-Palestine.

On Sunday we woke up to the news that six Israeli hostages had been executed by Hamas as Israeli forces came close — another six added to the tens of thousands of people in this land who should not have died over the past year. During this week, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets. They feel angry, desperate and betrayed by their Government. They have understood that the Israeli Government does not want to retain the hostages in the deal but to continue the war indefinitely.

To understand the Israeli Government's criminal conduct over the past 11 months, Council members have to understand the overall goal of the regime. Since Israel was founded, its guiding logic has been to promote Jewish supremacy over the entire territory under its control. The current Government's guidelines state that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right to all parts of the land of Israel."

In the criminal Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023, 1,200 Israelis were killed and 250 taken hostage. Since that day, I and every Israeli I know have been living in deep fear. Our Government is cynically exploiting our collective trauma to violently advance its project of cementing Israel's control over the entire land. To do

that, it is waging war on the entire Palestinian people, committing war crimes almost daily. In Gaza, that has taken the form of expulsion, starvation, killing and destruction on an unprecedented scale. It goes beyond revenge. Israel is using the opportunity to promote an ideological agenda, making Gaza uninhabitable. As the Council has been informed repeatedly, a vast part of Gaza's homes and infrastructure have been completely destroyed. By driving Palestinians out of entire areas and displacing millions, Israel is laying the groundwork for long-term control of Gaza that could lead to re-establishing Israeli settlements there.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Government is exploiting the circumstances to create irreversible changes. Since October 2023, Israeli forces have killed 640 Palestinians there, including at least 140 minors. Settlers are attacking Palestinians and carrying out pogroms in broad daylight with support from the Government. They have so far managed to drive 19 Palestinian communities out of their homes. And recently, the military launched a huge operation to damage infrastructure that serves hundreds of thousands of people in the northern West Bank. The international community did not stop Israel's criminal policy of massive harm to civilians in Gaza. Now that cruel policy is spilling over into the West Bank.

The war on Palestinians is also happening inside prisons. Since October, Israel has arrested thousands of Palestinians and held them in inhumane conditions. Last month, we at B'Tselem published a report called "Welcome to Hell". It shows the shocking pattern of abuse that amounts to torture. The Government of Israel has used the war to turn Israeli prisons into a network of torture camps for Palestinians.

That violence is possible because Israel has enjoyed impunity for decades. As long as that impunity continues, the killing and destruction will continue and expand, and fear will continue to rule the land. The international community has failed in its duty to protect civilians. Four Security Council resolutions on the Gaza conflict have not led to a lasting ceasefire or freed the hostages. The risk of regional escalation has grown. Diplomatic efforts have not stopped the mass killing of civilians and the humanitarian disaster in Gaza. The Council must acknowledge that failure and take effective action to compel Israel and Hamas to immediately and permanently cease all hostilities. But de-escalation is only the first step. It is time for the Council to address the opinion of the International Court

of Justice on the illegality of Israel's entire occupation and settlement project. Every day that the Council does not act on the Court's call to end the occupation and apartheid is another day that the Council is abandoning us, the people of this land, who are suffering and dying in tens of thousands, needlessly, under a cruel and unjust apartheid regime.

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

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

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): Let me first congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of September, and I want to extend the full support of Algeria to your mandate. I wish also to congratulate Sierra Leone for a very successful presidency during the month of August.

At the outset, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at a moment when our region, particularly the occupied Palestinian territory, is witnessing serious violations that threaten to unravel the very foundations upon which the international community has sought to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. I extend my thanks to both Ms. DiCarlo and Ms. Wosornu for their comprehensive briefings. We listened carefully to the briefers from civil society. Their words vividly illustrate the magnitude of the suffering endured by the Palestinian people — a suffering that underscores the failure of the international community to enforce its own decisions against an Israeli occupying Power that acts with impunity, shielded from accountability.

If we are gathered here today, it is because diplomacy has failed. It is because the Security Council, entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, has not fulfilled its duty. How many lives could have been saved, how much suffering could have been avoided if we had been more resolute in implementing our resolutions, including resolution 2735 (2024)? I cannot help but think that, had a ceasefire been imposed, more than 3,000 Palestinians, half of them women and children, would have been spared. I cannot help but think that, had the ceasefire been enforced by the Council, the six hostages would be alive and free today. For us, there can be no double standard in recognizing suffering or in grieving the loss of a loved one. For us, every life matters.

The Israeli occupation continues inflicting collective punishment upon the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The staggering toll of death and destruction reveals a barbarism aimed at erasing the Palestinian identity and, with it, the vision of the Palestinian State. As the world has struggled to secure a ceasefire in Gaza, despite the clear demand from the international community, including the Security Council, the Israeli occupier has escalated since last week its operations in the West Bank, continuing to slaughter Palestinians in blatant violation of international law. Since last October, in the West Bank, 679 Palestinians, including 150 children, have been killed by the Israeli occupying forces and by settlers. We all have condemned several times those war crimes and crimes against humanity, but today mere words are not enough. Today we must act to ensure that international law prevails. As the primary organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security, the Council must act without further delay to ensure its decisions are respected and implemented, and it must initiate a genuine and effective peace process in the Middle East.

The sanctity of human life and the shared experience of suffering must unite us, lest we lose our humanity. For us, every life holds equal value, regardless of race, religion or colour, and we cannot turn a blind eye to any suffering. Every single innocent life matters. Yet let us recognize that the plight of Palestinian detainees is too often silenced or ignored. They endure torture; they endure abuse; and they endure the denial of access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Since October, the ICRC has reported more than 8,700 missing Palestinians, mainly from Gaza, with the occupying authorities refusing to provide any information or allow Red Cross visits. Today more than 9,400 Palestinians, including more than 200 children, are being held in Israeli prisons. Among them are more than 3,600 administrative detainees who have been held for months without any charge. Those detainees suffer in silence, abandoned by the international community.

Since last October, the Israeli occupying authorities have killed 24 Palestinian detainees in their custody. Just Monday, the day before yesterday, the Israeli forces brutally executed Ayman Abed through beating and torture. Do Council members know what Ayman Abed's crime was? There was no crime. He was arrested

solely to pressure his son to turn himself in. That is the policy of the occupation.

The number 552 may be meaningless to many Council members, but for Palestinian families, it represents the bodies of their loved ones still being held by the Israeli occupier. Yes, the Israeli occupier is holding 552 bodies of Palestinians. Can Council members fathom that the body of Jasser Shatat, who was killed in 1968, is still being held by the Israeli occupier? Those responsible for all those crimes cannot remain unpunished. As President Tebboune stated, those involved in the massacre and extermination of Palestinians must be brought to justice.

In conclusion, we are faced with a test of our commitment to the law and to the principles that define the international order, and it is the responsibility of the international community and the Security Council, in particular, to protect the multilateral system by reining in the occupation authorities, who seek to extinguish the hope of a Palestinian State. Silence and inaction in the face of that policy and these atrocities will only drive the region towards further escalation.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of the presidency. I would also like to commend Sierra Leone for a successful presidency during the month of August. I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Director Wosornu, Dr. Bron-Harlev and Ms. Novak for their briefings during what is the first meeting in nearly a year on this issue.

Hersh Goldberg-Polin loved geography. For his bar mitzvah, he asked for atlases and maps — for the gift of understanding the world and of wrapping it in his arms. His father imagined that his son would someday work for *National Geographic*. But I think Hersh may have also become an American diplomat, a peacebuilder, someone who could forge even the deepest divides, maybe even here in this Chamber. I had the honour of getting to know Hersh through his parents, Rachel and Jon. On 7 October, Hamas killed their son's friend, blew off their son's hand and then stole their son's future, holding him hostage in the tunnels beneath Gaza for 331 days.

Devastation has a blurring effect. Days bleed together, the sheer scale of loss anonymizes its victims. And yet Rachel and Jon insisted that the world know their son as a person. Every single day they relived the worst moments of their lives, talking about Hersh to anyone and everyone who would listen to them — not

only about where he was, but who he was, about why his fate and the fate of hundreds of hostages mattered, and about why the fate of thousands upon thousands of innocent Palestinians mattered, too — stating that they, too, were people, each containing a universe, who wanted and deserved peace, who wanted to and deserved to live.

This past weekend we learned the devastating news that I hoped and prayed would never come — that after nearly 11 months in captivity, Hersh, along with five other hostages, was brutally killed by Hamas, that he and Carmel and Alex and Eden and Ori and Almog would never be reunited with their families.

Moments like these tempt people to retreat to their sides and to allow hurt to become hate. But I think about what Hersh's father said just a few weeks ago — that there is “a surplus of agony on all sides of the tragic conflict in the Middle East”, that “in a competition of pain, there are no winners”.

And so today I want to speak to the great many people living in agony. That includes hostages who remain in the hands of Hamas, hailing from across the world, including the United States. We are doing all we can to bring these Americans home and all the hostages home to their families.

The six hostages killed this weekend were executed at the same time that negotiators were discussing the names of individuals to be released in a ceasefire deal. It calls into question the sincerity of Hamas negotiators, and it reveals, yet again, the ugly truth about the vile, depraved ideology that Hamas represents. From its massacre of 1,200 people to its weaponization of sexual violence, these latest murders confirm that Hamas is a terrorist organization. I know some members of the Council will not acknowledge that, but that is the simple truth.

No member of the Council would tolerate their citizens being taken hostage and murdered — not a single one of us. The United States strongly condemns Hamas's brutality. It is long past time for the Council to do the same. Make no mistake — we can condemn Hamas for what they are and still have empathy for the suffering Palestinians in Gaza — men, women and children who are also experiencing agony. While Sinwar hides in tunnels underneath the ground and his henchmen murder hostages, Palestinian civilians are living in a hell on Earth. Their lives continue to be put at risk by his cowardice and intransigence.

As President Biden has made clear, Hamas's leadership will pay for their crimes. They must be held accountable. They cannot control Gaza. At the same time, we know that the best way to rescue the remaining hostages and alleviate the suffering of Palestinian civilians is through a negotiated ceasefire deal — one that will release the hostages and create conditions to enable a surge in life-saving aid in Gaza.

We cannot lose patience with diplomacy. Diplomacy is not a matter of snapping our fingers and voilà. It takes hard work. It takes effort and, unfortunately, it takes time. It has not failed. After all, it was diplomacy that helped secure the release of more than 100 hostages in November, and it is through diplomacy that we aim to bring the remaining hostages home and finally put this horrific conflict on a path towards a durable conclusion.

The Israeli people should understand that the deal on the table is one their leaders can accept because it is a deal that ensures Israel's security. As President Biden emphasized when announcing the principles of this deal, Hamas is no longer capable of carrying out another attack on the scale of 7 October. We therefore continue to work closely with Qatar and Egypt in order to find a way forward and do all we can to make this deal a reality once and for all.

At this crucial inflection point, it is vital that anyone who stands for peace, stand with the three of us and continue to apply pressure on Hamas to end its brutality and accept the deal on the table, which is based on the principles and framework the Council endorsed in resolution 2735 (2024). We cannot just move on. There is no palatable alternative to this diplomacy.

We met last week on the issue of polio and protecting civilians (see S/PV.9715). Since that meeting, Israel has coordinated closely with the United Nations to ensure that the World Health Organization and UNICEF could begin implementing a phased campaign vaccinating children under the age of 10 in Gaza. The United States welcomes the initial progress, with hundreds of thousands of vaccines administered in the first days of the campaign alone, and we reiterate the importance of ensuring that United Nations and non-governmental-organization personnel have the safety and the space to administer the polio vaccines and inoculate the population of Gaza at risk. Children's lives depend on their success.

Separately, we are closely following the situation in the West Bank. We are concerned about the recent

uptick in Israeli military activity there and believe that actions that could escalate tensions must be curtailed. In particular, violent rhetoric and attacks by extremist settlers against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank are unacceptable and must stop. The Israeli authorities must take measures to protect West Bank communities from harm, including by intervening to stop such violence and by holding all the perpetrators accountable.

We continue to emphasize that a revitalized and reformed Palestinian Authority is in Israel's own interests and that steps that undermine it will not make Israel more secure. Indeed, Hamas's brutal murder of hostages is a reminder that a terrorist group does not represent the vast majority of Palestinians and can never claim to do so. But Hamas's hateful ideology cannot be defeated through silence. Leaders in Ramallah and in countries throughout the region must condemn Hamas's violent actions and increase public pressure on Hamas to accept the deal on the table.

I hoped and believed that I would see Hersh Goldberg-Polin alive, that I would be able to meet him and talk to him about the magic of exploring and healing the world. I believed that I would be able to hug him and tell him how hard his parents fought for him, how hard they fought for every hostage, every hostage's family, every innocent Israeli and Palestinian whose life has been destroyed by the scourge of war. I am devastated that I will never be able to meet Hersh, but I know that his memory lives on in his extraordinary parents. I know that even though they have every reason to crawl under the covers and never emerge, they will continue to fight for humanity, for dignity, for peace and for diplomacy, even when it feels slow and even when it feels impossible. They will continue to fight for the return of the hostages, for an end to this horrific war and for a better future for us all. We owe it to them and their beloved son, and to parents and children like them — Israeli and Palestinian alike — to do the same.

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

France was outraged to learn of the murder of six hostages by Hamas. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones, to whom we extend our sincere condolences. France expresses its full solidarity with the Israeli people and reiterates its condemnation of the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Israel's security and call for

the release of all hostages, including our compatriots, which is an absolute priority for France.

An immediate and permanent ceasefire is essential as we are to bring an end to the suffering of the population and enable the massive delivery of humanitarian assistance, which cannot wait any longer. The humanitarian situation is catastrophic in terms of both health and food. France welcomes the start of the polio-vaccination campaign enabled by the efforts of the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The agreement on localized humanitarian pauses, which made the campaign possible, must continue as long as the situation on the ground requires. The vaccination campaign shows that it is possible to allow humanitarian actors to carry out their operations. That must become the rule, as required by international humanitarian law.

France is very concerned about the rapid deterioration of the situation in the northern West Bank following Israel's large-scale military operations, which are contributing to instability and are likely to trigger a serious cycle of violence throughout the West Bank. We condemn the settlement policy, which is contrary to international law. The Israeli authorities must put an end to the violence and policy of terror employed by some extremist settlers.

The only solution to ending the war and the humanitarian disaster that have been ongoing in the Gaza Strip for the past 11 months is an agreement between Hamas and Israel. France supports the mediation efforts of the United States, Egypt and Qatar. Those negotiations must finally reach a conclusion. France calls on the parties to make the necessary compromises. Faced with the rising tensions in the Middle East, the Council must do everything it can to avoid a regional conflagration. France is continuing its efforts in that regard in conjunction with its partners.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Director Wosornu, Dr. Bron-Harlev and Ms. Novak for briefing us today.

Last week we heard the news that the bodies of six Israeli hostages had been recovered in Gaza. We condemn their murder by Hamas. My Prime Minister has conveyed his thoughts and prayers for the families and the Israeli people. The United Kingdom supported Israel's request for this briefing to shine a spotlight

on Hamas's abhorrent crimes and their impact on innocent civilians. It is also entirely right, as the representative of Algeria proposed, to focus on recent grave developments in the West Bank and Gaza.

Of the 253 hostages taken in the horrific terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023, 101 remain captive in Gaza and subject to unimaginable horror. We once again condemn Hamas's terrorist acts in the strongest terms. We reiterate our demand that Hamas release the hostages immediately. There can be no doubt that Hamas pays not the slightest heed to international humanitarian law. We urge all parties to agree on a ceasefire deal, which would bring an end to the ordeal of those hostages. Israel continues to face threats, not only from Hamas, but also from Iran and its range of hostile proxies, which have been calling openly for Israel's annihilation. Iran should be in no doubt about our commitment to challenging its malign and destabilizing activity or about our commitment to Israel's security.

The suffering of Palestinians is also worsening every day. More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, many of them women and children. The most basic needs of children, including thousands who have been orphaned, are unmet. A ceasefire deal offers an opportunity to end their suffering. As we heard, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is beyond appalling, with dire sanitary conditions, a serious risk of famine and now polio. We welcome the polio-vaccination campaign and urge Israel to continue to cooperate with the World Health Organization and health agencies to ensure that the full 90 per cent of children who need it are vaccinated. More generally, as we heard, humanitarian access remains inadequate, with attacks on convoys, evacuation orders undermining operations and aid that is far below Israel's stated commitment to flooding Gaza with such aid. We urge Israel to do much more to ensure that life-saving food and medical supplies reach civilians in Gaza.

As my Foreign Secretary said this week, we are also deeply concerned by credible claims of mistreatment of Palestinian detainees, which the International Committee of the Red Cross cannot investigate after being denied access by Israel. Concerns on the treatment of detainees and humanitarian access were part of my Government's review into Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law. As a result, my Foreign Secretary took the decision to suspend certain United Kingdom arms export licences to Israel earlier this week.

That decision in no way undermines our unwavering commitment to Israel's security. While we recognize Israel's need to defend itself against security threats, the United Kingdom is also deeply worried by the ongoing Israel Defense Forces operations in the West Bank, particularly the reports of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Israel must also tackle the accelerating settler violence and end its illegal expansion of settlements, which undermine prospects for the realization of the two-State solution.

Let me conclude by thanking the United States, Qatar and Egypt for their efforts in the ongoing negotiations. The parties have had time to study the deal on the table. The parties must now bridge their differences and end the suffering by agreeing to a deal and an immediate ceasefire and rediscover the path to a two-State solution.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): As this is our first statement to the Council this month, let me begin by thanking Sierra Leone for its presidency last month and wishing you, Mr. President, every success in your presidency in September. I would also like to join my colleagues in thanking the four briefers today, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Edem Wosornu, Director of Schneider Children's Medical Center Efrat Bron-Harlev, and Executive Director of B'Tselem Yuli Novak, for their briefings.

Switzerland has strongly condemned the acts of terror and the taking and holding of hostages perpetrated by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups since 7 October. We are deeply shocked by the information confirmed by the United Nations that six hostages were executed by Hamas in Gaza on 1 September. The capture and execution of hostages are violations of international humanitarian law. Those violations constitute war crimes, and their perpetrators must be brought to justice.

We condemn those acts in the strongest possible terms and offer our condolences to their families. Switzerland calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. The hostages and their families have been living through an ordeal for 11 months. The hostages must be treated humanely, in accordance with the norms of international law, and receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the

medical assistance they need without further delay. That also applies to all persons detained by Israel in connection with the conflict, in particular minors.

As we just heard once more, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains catastrophic. We recall that civilians and civilian infrastructure are protected. We therefore condemn all attacks against civilians, which constitute flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes. Humanitarian personnel must be protected in order to come to the aid of civilians in need, as requested by resolution 2730 (2024). In order to achieve that, the guns must be silenced. That is crucial to enable United Nations agencies and their partners to carry out the two phases of vaccination needed to protect 640,000 children from polio in Gaza.

Switzerland welcomes the fact that, according to the World Health Organization, as we have also just heard, the first phase is proceeding without major incident in the centre of the Gaza Strip. We commend humanitarian workers for their commitment and courage under very difficult conditions, and we urge all parties to continue to facilitate that campaign. As stated during the meeting requested by Switzerland and the United Kingdom last week (see S/PV.9715), that campaign demonstrates that a large-scale humanitarian operation is possible in Gaza if hostilities cease and safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access is guaranteed, in accordance with international humanitarian law. It is high time that that became a reality throughout the Gaza Strip.

A ceasefire is imperative and urgent throughout the Gaza Strip. Switzerland reiterates its support for the mediation of the United States, Qatar and Egypt to reach an agreement to that end, in accordance with resolution 2735 (2024). Such a ceasefire will also make a major contribution to regional de-escalation, but it is not enough. In order to prevent the regionalization of the conflict at all costs, compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, is necessary. That also applies to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where violence has reached levels not seen since the second intifada, particularly as a result of attacks by settlers and operations carried out by Israeli security forces, such as those currently under way in the Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas governorates. In those operations, the use of force by Israel must, in particular, meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality and respect every individual's right to life and security of person.

Failing that, and as the International Court of Justice also pointed out in its advisory opinion of 19 July, excessive use of force and Israel's failure to prevent or punish settler attacks are incompatible with Israel's obligations under international law. Switzerland stresses that Israel, as the occupying Power, is responsible for maintaining law and order in the West Bank and for ensuring the protection and well-being of the population, which includes the realization of their fundamental rights. We urge the Israeli authorities to bring to justice all those responsible for violence against civilians and the deliberate destruction of civilian property and infrastructure.

We will say it again and again: any act of violence against civilians, whether Israelis or Palestinians, is unacceptable. International law must be respected as an essential first step on the road to peace. That path must lead to a 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. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the speakers for their briefings and the presidency for convening this meeting quickly and efficiently, responding to requests from several delegations. I also congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency and pledge our delegation's full support.

Ecuador strongly condemns the murder of the six Israeli hostages whose bodies were found in the south of the Strip last weekend. The murder of hostages is a grave violation of human rights and international law. Those responsible must be brought to justice and made to pay for their actions. My country extends its condolences to the families of the slain hostages.

The release of the 101 hostages who have been held by Hamas since their abduction during the terrorist attacks perpetrated by that group on 7 October 2023, which my country once again deplores, is imperative. That release of hostages must take place immediately and unconditionally. There is also a need for an immediate ceasefire that will enable an improvement in the increasingly difficult humanitarian conditions facing the civilian population in Gaza and a reduction in regional tensions. Ecuador also condemns the attacks on civilians and humanitarian personnel. The death and destruction must stop. Ultimately, the situation makes clear the need for implementing resolution 2735 (2024) without excuses or false delays. To that end, the parties

must now conclude their negotiations in good faith, demonstrating political will and real courage. That would at least minimally honour the best interests of the children, Palestinian and Israeli, who must at all times be protected — certainly not hurt and much less deliberately attacked. The polio-vaccination campaign, which began a few days ago, is proof that genuine political will achieves results. Ecuador appreciates and is grateful for the work of the World Health Organization and all the United Nations agencies involved in that effort.

With regard to the situation in the West Bank, the escalation of violence and the large-scale military operations in the area in the past few days compel us to reiterate the calls that have repeatedly been made for restraint and moderation, with respect for the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times. It must always be remembered that civilians and civilian infrastructure cannot be targeted and must be protected.

Finally, it is vital to stop provocations and statements that exacerbate the violence. The status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem must be respected. It is time to act responsibly.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council. You have Guyana's full support. I also extend our gratitude to the delegation of Sierra Leone for its excellent stewardship last month. I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Director Wosornu for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the moving words of Dr. Bron-Harlev and Ms. Novak.

The arbitrary deprivation of an individual's liberty is one of the most egregious crimes there is. It is particularly repulsive because it attacks a person's dignity, especially when that individual — someone's mother, father, sister, brother, grandparent or other relative — is reduced to a bargaining chip. Guyana reiterates its strong condemnation of the taking of hostages during the 7 October attacks on Israel and underscores that such actions constitute a grave violation of international law, particularly article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. On the same principle, we also demand the immediate release of all Palestinians arbitrarily detained in Israel. No life is more valuable than another and a crime is still a crime, regardless of its perpetrator.

The people of Palestine continue to be deprived of their freedom and are now being dragged to the edge of a precipice. There is every indication that they will be thrown over that precipice unless drastic measures to stop the aggressor are taken by the Council and by countries with real influence. What is needed is simply that the aggression of the occupying Power against the Palestinian people must stop, immediately and unconditionally. However, we should not entertain the dangerous notion that a cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, which those hostilities are now spreading to, is a privilege that we must implore the occupying Power to grant to innocent civilians in Palestine. Neither should we entertain the equally dangerous notion that Israel has a right to defend itself in whatever manner it deems fit. On the contrary, Israel has both legal and moral obligations to end its hostilities in Gaza and the West Bank and to take every possible action to ensure the protection of civilians and the provision of essential goods and services for their survival. How many more briefings do we need to hear and how many more tragic statistics must we be apprised of before we take meaningful and decisive measures to stop the genocide of Palestinians?

Eighty-six days ago, the Council adopted resolution 2735 (2024), in the fervent belief that we were setting the stage for a speedy deal involving a ceasefire, the release of hostages and a surge in humanitarian assistance. Sadly, in those 86 days, the death toll in Gaza has risen by more than 3,600 and the number of injured by more than 9,500. Those developments in Gaza have been compounded by increasing violence and the killing of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. Things have only got worse for Palestinians, the Israeli hostages and indeed the entire region since the adoption of that resolution. The goal posts seem to shift at every turn, with Hamas and Israel accusing each other of obstructing progress in the negotiations. With a deal seemingly elusive, Guyana urges the Council to act swiftly to bring an end to the atrocities being meted out to Palestinian civilians.

As the United Nations prepares for the Summit of the Future, I am compelled to contemplate what the future holds for Palestinians. With no visible horizon of hope, in a struggle older than this Chamber, it looks bleak. The occupying Power sits at the head of the table of those enabling the cultivation of a culture of hatred between Israelis and Palestinians. While people on both sides suffer, politicians stoke discord for self-

preservation. Let us call a spade a spade. Who are the real benefactors of the ongoing war in Gaza? It is not right, moral, just or legal to continue fuelling the war, where those bearing the brunt are innocent women and children. Guyana believes that the majority of our leaders cannot comfortably adopt the Pact for the Future, with its noble aspirations, while turning a blind eye to the ongoing indiscriminate killing of Palestinians. History is already judging us, but the Council has the power and responsibility to turn the tide.

It is worth recalling that the situation in Palestine today did not begin on 7 October 2023. We must cast our minds back to 1948, because it was in that year that Israel first violently rejected a two-State solution. Since then that violent rejection has continued, manifested in cycles of war and ever-expanding settlement activities, among other things. What we have seen since 7 October are the symptoms of that rejection of a two-State solution, with the victimizer capitalizing on the horrific events of that day to realize its own sinister motives, even amid protests by its own citizens. Again, let us call a spade a spade.

Over the past few days, the names of the hostages whose bodies were recovered have been repeated and we have come to know a bit about their lives. It is the least that we can do to honour their memory and the tragic circumstances in which they died. That has also compelled me to contemplate the fate of the thousands of innocent Palestinians who have been killed since 7 October, and whose names could not all be mentioned without taking a day for every 10,000 people killed. Guyana believes, though, that the best way to honour the memory of all of the Palestinians and Israelis who have died in the war is for the Council to take immediate action to end it. We have the tools at our disposal. Let us use them.

In conclusion, while each of these briefings is a grotesque recollection of all the horrors of the war, it must be more than that. It must be a call to action to which the Council responds decisively, substantively and effectively. While Plato may have asserted that only the dead have seen the end of war, the Council can ensure that remaining generations of Palestinians and Israelis can also see and experience the end of war, and more than that, experience sustainable peace.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): First of all, I would like to express our gratitude to Sierra Leone for its successful presidency of the Council in August and to wish

Slovenia the best of luck with its presidency this month. Let me also thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Director Wosornu, Dr. Bron-Harlev and Ms. Novak for their respective briefings.

We are almost 11 months into this devastating conflict and yet the violence and tragedies in Gaza are never-ending. The news that six hostages held by Hamas were found dead is truly heartbreaking. Japan is deeply saddened and outraged by the murder of those innocent hostages, and we express our sincere condolences to their bereaved families and loved ones. It is inhumane and totally unacceptable to use hostages' lives as bargaining chips. Hamas must release all the remaining hostages immediately.

Turning to the overall situation in Gaza, Japan remains appalled by the ever-increasing civilian casualties — mostly women and children — the massive displacement and the worsening humanitarian situation due to the relentless hostilities. We welcome the successful implementation of the first few days of the polio-vaccination campaign under temporary pauses, and we are relieved to hear that more than 180,000 children have been vaccinated so far. The brave efforts and dedication of the relevant United Nations agencies, despite the extremely difficult conditions, are commendable. However, the suffering of Palestinians and the desperate situation in Gaza will remain the same as long as the fighting continues. Nowhere is safe. People are compressed into ever smaller areas by the repeated evacuation orders. There are critical shortages of food, medicine, clean water and other basic necessities. Public order has collapsed, further threatening the welfare of the population and creating challenges to the efforts of aid workers. In short, civilians are paying the highest price for the conflict. Japan reiterates that all the parties must strictly abide by the relevant principles of international humanitarian law, most importantly that of the protection of civilians, and must ensure the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid.

While our eyes are on Gaza, Japan is also seriously concerned about the deteriorating situation in the West Bank. We deeply regret the continuing settlement activity and condemn the extreme violence committed by settlers against Palestinians. Most recently, the ongoing large-scale Israeli military operations in the West Bank and their ramifications are alarming.

In the inflamed Middle East, one thing that could relieve tensions in the region would be a deal that brings the hostages home, achieves an immediate ceasefire and expands the delivery of humanitarian aid at scale throughout Gaza. In that regard, Japan strongly supports the tireless diplomatic efforts by the United States, Egypt and Qatar and urges both parties, especially Hamas, to swiftly conclude the deal in accordance with resolution 2735 (2024). All parties must prioritize ending the agony of innocent civilians rather than focusing on political gains.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting at the request of Israel, supported by the delegations of France, the United Kingdom and the United States, and at the separate request of the delegation of Algeria, to discuss various issues related to the conflict in Gaza. I thank the briefers, Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and Director Edem Wosornu, for their important briefings. And I thank Dr. Efrat Bron-Harlev and Ms. Yuli Novak for the information they provided. Sierra Leone congratulates Slovenia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and we wish you and your team the very best, Mr. President. I want to assure you of our full support. Let me also thank all Council members for their support during our presidency in August.

One of the consequences of the heinous attack of 7 October 2023 on Israeli civilians was the taking of approximately 250 hostages by Hamas and other armed groups — an act that contravenes international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly prohibits hostage-taking as a grave breach of international humanitarian law. That prohibition is reaffirmed under rule 96 of customary international humanitarian law, as identified by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Sierra Leone has repeatedly condemned that act in the strongest terms since 7 October and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all the remaining hostages held by Hamas. It is therefore deeply concerning to note the contents of the identical letters dated 1 September 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, reporting the discovery of “the bodies of six Israeli hostages [...] held in Hamas’ tunnels for over 10 months”, with 101 hostages still unaccounted for by Hamas (*S/2024/647, p.1*).

That tragic loss, combined with the prolonged suffering of the remaining hostages in worsening, unpredictable and unknown conditions and without any humanitarian access, underscores the need for impartial, independent investigations and for those responsible to be held accountable. In that regard, Sierra Leone continues to support the work of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court since his announcement of the opening of investigations into the situation in the State of Palestine, following Pre-Trial Chamber I’s decision that the Court could exercise its criminal jurisdiction in the situation, which covers the territorial scope of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

With all the tragedies unfolding since 7 October of last year, civilians have been at the centre of it all, as they unwillingly carry a burden too grievous to bear. The humanitarian situation continues to reveal the harsh realities in the Gaza Strip, as indiscriminate attacks, collective punishment, blockades, hunger, disease and displacement push civilians towards and beyond the brink of human dignity and civilization. The re-emergence of polio in Gaza — which had previously been eradicated — owing to the disruption to child vaccination programmes and the massive damage to water and sanitation systems caused by the war is just one of the consequences. However, amid an atmosphere of high tension and risks, we welcome the area-specific humanitarian pauses that are enabling the roll-out of the first phase of the polio-vaccination campaign in central Gaza. The joint efforts of the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other partners reinforces the selfless nature of the humanitarian personnel in the field. We reiterate their appeal to the relevant parties to the conflict to respect the temporary pauses and work to achieve a long-overdue and lasting ceasefire.

Turning to the West Bank, Sierra Leone is deeply concerned about the ongoing large-scale operations in the West Bank by Israeli security forces since 27 August. We regret that 29 deaths and 50 injuries have been reported as of 1 September, with casualties from the West Bank governorates of Jenin, Tubas and Tulkarem. We welcome the withdrawal of Israel’s forces from Tulkarem and Tubas, and implore them to do the same in Jenin, an area where they have instituted a curfew, which has been reported to be seriously affecting the residents and their access to essential services.

The 19 July 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem* has made it clear in its determination, among others, that “Israel’s continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful and that Israel is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as rapidly as possible”. Sierra Leone can only urge the State of Israel to comply and urge the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, to work on the modalities for the immediate implementation of the advisory opinion.

At this point in the conflict, it is evident that the civilians in the Gaza Strip can no longer endure the untold suffering being inflicted on them. Can we for once consider the sanctity and priceless nature of a single human life, let alone the more than 40,000 civilians who have lost their lives and the 94,224 injured in Gaza? With that in mind, Sierra Leone will make the following points.

First, we call on the relevant parties to the conflict to implement the resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 2735 (2024), which with the passage of time would require further action by the Council. We urge the parties to respond in good faith to the mediation efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States by committing to an immediate cessation of hostilities and agreeing to a deal that will facilitate the exchange of hostages and prisoners, provide substantial humanitarian aid and establish a permanent ceasefire.

Secondly, in seeking to address the reported sticking points in the ongoing negotiations, we call on parties to the conflict to explore feasible options, including the proposal that has been put forward by the Secretary-General on security guarantees in Gaza and for Israel.

Thirdly, we continue to remind the relevant parties of their obligations to respect and comply with international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

Fourthly, and as part of the future outlook, Sierra Leone reaffirms its commitment to the political horizon of the two-State solution, in which two States, Israel and Palestine, coexist peacefully within secure and recognized borders. We therefore reiterate our rejection of statements and actions of the parties to the conflict

that incite or undermine efforts towards a peaceful solution of that prolonged conflict.

Let me conclude by stating that upholding human dignity and the rule of law is a shared global responsibility. Therefore, Sierra Leone reiterates its condemnation of all acts of violence against civilians and calls for independent and impartial investigations that will lead to accountability to put an end to impunity, recognizing the critical nexus between peace and justice. My delegation therefore stands ready to steadfastly pursue any initiative that will advance the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): Since this is the first meeting of the Security Council this month, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council. I also thank Sierra Leone for steering this work during the month of August in an efficient and professional manner. I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo; Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Edem Wosornu; and other briefers for their insightful remarks and sobering briefings.

It is gravely alarming that with each briefing the Security Council receives, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel steadily worsens.

We are deeply saddened and appalled by and condemn the killing of six Israeli hostages held captive by Hamas, and we extend our sincere condolences to their families and friends. Our thoughts are with them and with the families of those whose loved ones are still being held hostage, including children. We remain concerned about the reports of sexual violence targeting the hostages and the dire conditions in which they are being held, which we wholly condemn. Equally worrisome are Hamas’s recent announcements that hostages are to be killed should the Israel Defense Forces close in on them. The protection and upholding of human rights are paramount, and the rights of the hostages are to be safeguarded at all costs.

As we have said many times in this Chamber, Malta reiterates its unreserved condemnation of the 7 October terror attacks and the ensuing killings and hostage-taking committed by Hamas and other armed groups. We reiterate that hostage-taking is a grave violation of international law. We demand yet again the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Humanitarian access to the hostages must also be facilitated. Those are demands that the Council has

consistently repeated since 7 October and has enshrined in resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024).

At the same time, we must also highlight the dire situation of arbitrarily detained Palestinians, suffering decrepit conditions in Israeli detention. Individuals forcibly detained and imprisoned without charge must be released, and independent investigations into allegations of torture need to take place.

An immediate and permanent ceasefire remains the only clear path through which the bloodshed and suffering on both sides can finally be put to an end. The urgency of a ceasefire is undeniable in the face of a situation in Gaza that is catastrophic, with civilians bearing the brunt of the conflict. We call on the parties to prioritize dialogue and agree to the terms of a ceasefire, in line with resolution 2735 (2024).

Malta welcomes news that polio inoculations for children in Gaza are well under way, with more than 187,000 vaccinated. We commend the parties involved in the logistics of the campaign, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other partners. Amid conditions fraught with perils on every front, Gazan children deserve to be protected from that additional health risk.

However, we stress that other relentless threats to their lives must also be addressed. Reports of children being killed or admitted to besieged hospitals with shrapnel injuries due to shelling in densely populated residential areas persist. Children are neither a target nor collateral damage. Their special protections under international humanitarian law are clear and need to be urgently adhered to by all parties.

Under conditions of food insecurity, severe water and sanitation deficiencies and a devastated health system, brought about as a direct result of Israel's military campaign, additional threats are always imminent. Efforts to address the colossal humanitarian needs of Gaza's civilian population must be adequately accelerated and conducted without conditions or impediments.

The situation in the occupied West Bank is also of grave concern. The past week has seen alarming violence across the West Bank, including in Jenin, owing to intensified military operations, air strikes, armed clashes and settler violence. The most recent surge

in violence has already resulted in many deaths and injuries and is threatening to push the West Bank over the edge. An escalation on that front must be prevented at all costs. We call for the protection of civilians and for civilian infrastructure to be prioritized. The West Bank must not turn into another Gaza.

Amid the continued risk of a regional escalation, we also continue to emphasize the urgent need to rapidly reduce tensions and avoid actions that could exacerbate the inflammatory situation. Parties need to urgently resort to dialogue and diplomacy and secure a ceasefire. That is the only way to address the immediate-term priorities in Gaza and the West Bank and to ensure the release of the hostages and a credible political horizon for a comprehensive realization of the two-State solution.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to extend its sincere and warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, and your country, the Republic of Slovenia, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We pledge our full support in the discharge of your heavy responsibilities. We highly praise Sierra Leone for their remarkable and successful presidency in the month of August. We are grateful to the briefers — Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Dr. Efrat Bron-Harlev, Director of Schneider Medical Centre; and Ms Yuli Novak, Israeli human rights activist and Executive Director of B'Tselem. Their briefings to the Council have been invaluable and illuminating.

After 11 months of war, the situation in the Gaza Strip remains a matter of grave concern. The conflict rages on, and it has had an enormous negative impact on the lives of civilians, including those in captivity. Hostages and the Gazan population are facing immense suffering and uncertainty, without any prospect or ray of hope. Attacks on refugee camps and towns in the West Bank are a near-daily occurrence, and they have been intensifying.

Since October 2023, when the current hostilities erupted, Mozambique and other members of the Council and — in fact — the entire international community, have been calling for the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law, which is being systematically violated by the

warring parties in Gaza. We consider it imperative that all parties scrupulously comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and International human rights law, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The endemic prevalence of violence in Gaza and Palestine, in general, has been a clear indication of the need for the Security Council to redouble its efforts towards achieving a lasting peace. It is therefore imperative that this conflict cease immediately.

Acknowledging the danger of the continuing situation, we underscore the critical need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza to de-escalate the ongoing conflict. We emphasize the importance of releasing hostages, increasing humanitarian aid and returning to diplomatic efforts to reach a lasting solution.

In that context, Mozambique reiterates its call for genuine and meaningful efforts for peace, understanding and cooperation in the Middle East. The central goal must be to achieve a two-State solution. That is the sole basis upon which Israel and Palestine can live together and prosper, side by side, in peace and security as two independent and sovereign States — both as members of the United Nations.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I join others in commending the work accomplished by Sierra Leone during its presidency in August. I also extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency for September, and I wish you a productive term ahead. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Director Wosornu of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the two briefers from civil society organizations, for their sobering and extremely painful briefings.

Our calls in the Council for the release of all hostages taken by Hamas and other groups have been clear and steadfast. However, our voice has not been heeded, and we are devastated to hear the tragic news of the killing of six hostages held in Gaza. We extend our deep condolences to their families. The taking and execution of hostages are strictly prohibited under international humanitarian law. Such acts can never be justified under any circumstances and must be unequivocally condemned. We once again urge Hamas to immediately release all remaining hostages.

During the Security Council Arria Formula meeting in May on Israeli hostages, we heard the

agonizing story of Carmel Gat from Mr. Roman, a family member. Hearing that account deepens our anguish. We are also heartbroken to hear that three of the six hostages killed were slated to be released in the first phase of the ceasefire deal still on the table. If the deal for the ceasefire and release of hostages had been finalized earlier, those innocent people could have been reunited with their families.

As such, however difficult the negotiating process is, the parties to this conflict must faithfully participate in the talks without adding more conditions that may lengthen the negotiations. Efforts by the mediators — the United States, Egypt and Qatar — which we greatly value, should also continue. Every day, every hour and every minute is directly linked to the fate of numerous lives. Delaying the ceasefire for no reason may amount to a criminal act.

We are appalled by the ongoing killing of innocent civilians, including hostages, and by the deteriorating humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. No sign of improvement can be seen on the humanitarian front, as strikes on shelters, forced displacement, hunger and disease continue to cruelly torment innocent families. As discussed last week (see S/PV.9715), a widespread outbreak of polio should not compound the already disastrous situation in Gaza.

We therefore highly appreciate the relentless efforts by selfless humanitarian actors to support the mass polio vaccination campaign under way amid constant insecurity. Humanitarian pauses to ensure the success of the vaccination must be strictly upheld by both parties. Failure to prevent the spread of polio in Gaza will have a fatal impact in the wider region, including Israel.

Amid the ongoing hostilities in Gaza, we are also extremely troubled by the continuous instability and violence in the West Bank, another occupied territory. We are particularly worried by the widespread military operations conducted by the Israeli security forces all across the West Bank, including air strikes and the targeting of civilian infrastructure in Jenin.

At the same time, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad must refrain from carrying out terrorist attacks. Ongoing violence and terrorism, in tandem with expanded settlement activity are not only threatening the lives and livelihoods of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, but also seriously undermining and hampering the way forward to the vision of the two-

State solution, which is clearly provided by resolution 2735 (2024) and is fully supported and encouraged by nearly all United Nations Member States. In order to make that common aspiration a reality in the future, not just words on paper, any acts or rhetoric that hinder its realization should now be prohibited and avoided as far as possible.

Israel should ban and refrain from illegal settlement activities and inflammatory rhetoric, which are inconsistent with resolution 2334 (2016). Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority should be equipped with able leadership and should overhaul its governance in order to truly lay the ground for a two-State solution. The Republic of Korea will participate constructively in any further discussions in the Security Council and the General Assembly towards that common aspiration.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I congratulate Slovenia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of September. The Chinese delegation would like to assure you and your team, Mr. President, of our full support for your work. I also want to register our appreciation for Sierra Leone's presidency during the month of August. I thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, Director Wosornu and the two civil society briefers for their briefings.

The news that six hostages have perished in Gaza is distressing, and their tragic end evokes our sympathy. China condemns all violence against civilians and denounces all violations of international law and international humanitarian law. We repeat our call for greater diplomatic efforts to be made towards the immediate release of all detainees, Israeli and Palestinian, so that they can go home without further delay. The stark reality speaks volumes about the futility of attempts to win a "total victory" by prolonging the war, which is wishful thinking at best. The use of force will not pave the way for a release of the hostages. It will only aggravate hate and antagonism and make the confrontations more intense and the situation more volatile. The Israeli leadership should listen to the public's forceful appeals, make securing the release of hostages and saving lives a top priority and do their utmost to make a ceasefire happen and end the war. We call on the countries that have influence over the warring parties to show good faith and a responsible attitude by taking tangible actions to put out the flames of war in Gaza.

Every life matters, and no one deserves to be deprived of the right to live. We commend the World Health Organization and other humanitarian agencies, which are working against all odds to provide polio vaccinations for Gazan children, who have the same right to grow up healthy as their peers elsewhere in the world. They should look forward to a childhood that they can enjoy in safety and with enough food to eat. They do not deserve to continue to face the deadly threat of lethal weapons after being vaccinated.

Next week will mark the start of the eleventh month of the conflict in Gaza. Despite repeated international efforts and repeated international calls for a ceasefire and an end to all hostilities, there is still no sign of easing or de-escalation. What we are rather seeing is a continued escalation of the situation in the West Bank as we speak, in addition to what is going on in Gaza. The international community must not allow the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza to be repeated in the West Bank. China urges the parties — Israel in particular — to show calm and restraint, and for Israel to fulfil its obligations as the occupying Power, halt settler activities, stop attacks in the West Bank and respect and maintain the status quo, shaped by history, of the holy sites in Jerusalem. For too long, this war has been raging, the ceasefire negotiations have been delayed and the suffering of the population has persisted. It is time to put an end to all of that. We support the Security Council taking further action aimed at implementing the relevant Council resolutions, extinguishing the flames of war without delay and alleviating the humanitarian fallout.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Before I begin my statement, I would like to join my colleagues, Mr. President, in wishing you every success in your presidency of the Security Council this month. You can count on our full support. I would also like to pay tribute to our colleagues from Sierra Leone for their very successful presidency of the Council last month.

We thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director of Operations Wosornu for their comprehensive briefings on this issue, and we listened closely to the statements of the civil society briefers. It is clear from their statements that the current wave of escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is growing increasingly grim and ugly. We were all shocked to learn of the deaths of six hostages in Nuseirat, including Russian

citizen Alexander Lobanov. We express our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims. There is and can be no justification for such actions, and we have repeatedly said that from the very beginning. From the very beginning we have also called for prioritizing the issue of the release of hostages, which can be achieved only through an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, as we are all well aware.

Now is not the time to debate why the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has reached a point where entirely innocent Israelis are dying in the underground tunnels of Gaza while Palestinian women and children are dying on the ground above. We have all given numerous assessments of what is happening. Now is the time to act. The Council has come to some kind of understanding on what must be done, and resolution 2735 (2024), adopted on 10 June, despite all its shortcomings, basically reflects that understanding. However, the Israeli leadership is obstinately seeking a military solution to the problem, attempting to disregard the Council's resolutions. As a result, at least several dozen Israeli hostages have reportedly died in Gaza while attempts were under way to free them. They did not live to see a ceasefire. Following the deaths of the six hostages in Nuseirat, Israeli society has given clear assessments of what happened. Literally the entire country, in unison, demanded that the Israeli Government urgently reach a deal with Hamas that would lead to the release of the remaining hostages. And we have all demanded that too, but those demands are falling on deaf ears in West Jerusalem.

Today we are grieving not only for the Israelis who died but for all who have died in Gaza, whether they are Israelis, Palestinians or citizens of other countries. Each day of inaction on the part of the Council, which has so far failed to compel the parties to cease hostilities, has had a horrific, bloody price, and civilians are paying it with their lives. However we feel about the events of 7 October 2023, we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that in the 11 months of the escalation in Gaza more than 40,000 Palestinians have fallen victim to Israel's collective punishment, and that figure is growing with each passing day. Violence and lawlessness reign in Gaza. We note the extremely alarming reports of Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, particularly strikes on humanitarian convoys, as well as the evidence of mass graves of murdered Palestinians who bear signs of torture and the removal of internal organs. All of those incidents, as well as the deaths of

hostages, must be thoroughly investigated, and through an international format.

It is clear to all of us that each new day of the Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip reduces the likelihood of the hostages' survival. The Council is united in recognizing that the release of the remaining Israelis and foreign hostages through military means is impossible and that there is no alternative to negotiations. Israeli society clearly recognizes that too. However, the Israeli leadership unfortunately continues to regard the negotiations as a mere smokescreen helping to distract the international community's attention from Israel's violent solution to the Palestinian question. We see that not only in West Jerusalem's actions on the ground but also in recent remarks by Prime Minister Netanyahu, saying that he will not stop the military action in the Strip. We still see no indication that Israel's military cabinet has any intention of amending that policy. Almost all members of the Security Council have the intention and desire to operate in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and to compel countries to comply with Council resolutions. The Security Council has the relevant tools at its disposal. Political will and unity on this question are what is needed now. Unfortunately, our United States colleagues are preventing us from achieving that. They continue to consistently provide cover for Israel's actions, supplying it with weaponry and consequently, encouraging it to continue its military operation in Gaza.

It is therefore hardly surprising that we are bearing witness to the growing appetite in West Jerusalem, which continues to advance more and more new conditions for reaching a "deal", although the parameters of the deal were approved by the Council in resolution 2735 (2024). Initially, we discussed the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Strip, and now, Israel is insisting upon maintaining its presence in the Philadelphi and Netzarim corridors. The Security Council gave its consent to completely different parameters for the agreement, meaning that those demands are a direct breach of the provisions of the aforementioned Security Council resolution. The United States mediators, unfortunately, are openly playing into the hands of their ally, and they are continuously helping it to violate Security Council resolutions. With each meeting, they are attempting to persuade the Council to put pressure on Hamas, claiming that a deal is already on the horizon. At the same time, the fact that Israel ultimately did not consent to the deal within the parameters of resolution

2735 (2024) and is continuously attempting to modify it, is something that our United States colleagues are cunningly sweeping under the rug.

Ultimately, the Security Council has effectively remained a hostage of the United States, which threatens to block any resolution containing a clear demand for a full-fledged ceasefire. The Council has been compelled to limit itself to declarative statements in favour of promptly reaching a deal between Hamas and Israel.

Under those circumstances, naturally, all the Council's humanitarian efforts are flagging. As humanitarian workers themselves have repeatedly emphasized, they are simply unable to work in the absence of a ceasefire. Against that backdrop, Israeli military personnel are systematically cleansing not only Gaza, but also the West Bank. The Israeli army raids in Jenin, Tubas and Tulkarm speak to one thing, namely, that there is no longer any safe place for Palestinians anywhere, neither in Gaza nor in the West Bank, where nearly 700 people have been killed since the escalation began. In August alone, there were more than 1,000 reported incidents of attacks by Israeli troops and settlers against civilians in the West Bank. According to Doctors without Borders, Israeli military personnel are obstructing access by victims to medical facilities, in addition to obstructing the circulation of emergency vehicles.

At the same time, one of the most senior Israeli officials, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, is calling for transitioning to the practice of collective punishment and execution by firing squad of Palestinian prisoners and for the establishment of multiple checkpoints in the West Bank to impede the movement of local residents. He directly and explicitly calls Palestinians animals. Moreover, the Israeli Cabinet, as we are aware, has adopted new plans to construct new settlements in the West Bank. Thus, a decision was taken to continue to undertake actions that are condemned by the entire membership of the Security Council and the overwhelming majority of the international community. That situation can only be viewed as an egregious violation of international law and of the principles that constitute the bedrock of the universally accepted international legal basis for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

The Council cannot afford to remain inactive in the face of the developments in Gaza and the West Bank. We gave the negotiators, who are trying to secure the

deal between Israel and Hamas based on the parameters set out in resolution 2735 (2024), three months already to persuade both sides to accept the deal. That was more than enough time. Now we see that the negotiation process, in the light of the new Israeli demands, is becoming drawn out and unpredictable.

Those who are defending West Jerusalem need to summon the courage, not in word but in deed, to fulfil their responsibilities as conscientious members of the international community and permanent members of the Security Council. And together with all of us, they must not just demand an end to the inhumane slaughter in Gaza, but also take concrete steps to that end, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations. Only that will make it possible to save the remaining Israeli hostages and the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Palestinian civilians who have been forced to resist the ruthless Israeli war machine. The world is waiting. The time for diplomatic games is over. The time has come for real and practical action. And the sooner they recognize and acknowledge that, the better for them.

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

I join others in thanking our briefers today for their contribution to today's discussion.

There is a sense of outrage that is felt around the globe — outrage in Palestine, that the international community is failing them; outrage on Israeli streets, that the hostages continue to be held in Gaza; and outrage of the global public, that this war is not stopping. This week, the Slovenian public expressed its outrage at the parallel realities, criticizing the political reality of our ongoing debates without solutions.

Let me be clear that parallel realities exist: the reality of the decades-long suffering of and the human rights violations against the Palestinian people; the reality of the security concerns of the Israeli people; but also, the reality of regional instability, which is a threat to international peace and security. There is only one possible common denominator among those realities, and that is peace. We therefore repeat our strong call for an immediate ceasefire.

Only a ceasefire will alleviate the suffering of hostages and their family members and friends. We repeat our condemnation of the 7 October 2023 attack carried out by Hamas and other armed groups and of the taking of hostages. We call for the International

Committee of the Red Cross to be granted full access to the hostages and for their immediate release. We are shocked by the death of the hostages whose bodies were rescued on Saturday, and we unequivocally condemn their killing. We offer our condolences to their loved ones. The suffering of hostages should not be a bargaining chip for negotiations.

Only a ceasefire will alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. Another briefing in less than a week is a clear demonstration that the situation is deteriorating. We welcome the start of the polio vaccination campaign carried out by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Gaza. That should be a turning point in ensuring unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access for aid delivery at scale and in restoring essential services.

We take this opportunity to repeat our concern about the rapidly deteriorating situation in the West Bank, which exhibits concerning destructive parallels. We reiterate our appeals from last week (see S/PV.9715). There must be an immediate end to the operations, which are further fuelling violence, tensions and human rights violations in the West Bank. We repeat our call for full adherence by all parties to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The provisional measures of the International Court of Justice and Security Council resolutions must be fully implemented. Protecting civilians and alleviating their suffering should not be a bargaining chip for negotiations.

What should be a part of negotiations is the pursuit of a just and lasting peace. We call on all to recalibrate their interests and place the interests of peace and the protection of all civilians, Palestinians and Israelis alike, first. They must recommit to and finalize the agreement set out by the Council's resolution 2735 (2024).

In a world of parallel realities, it is our job to push for peace. We therefore believe that the Council should proceed with two steps: a strong, united call for the conclusion of ceasefire negotiations led by Egypt, Qatar and the United States and a focused discussion on the peace process leading us to the two-State solution. The members of the Council have consistently voiced their strong support for a two-State solution, both through statements and in resolutions. It is now time to reflect on how to provide a clear framework for reaching a point of convergence on the horizon.

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): I just want to respond very briefly to my Russian colleague's remarks. First and foremost, I am very glad to hear him pledge support for the Charter of the United Nations. I hope that means that Russia will soon be pulling its troops out of Ukraine and ending its war of aggression there.

My second and last point is a call, an urging, for Council members and other States represented in this Chamber that have influence with Hamas to use it by calling on Hamas to accept the ceasefire and hostage deal immediately. To be very frank, the sooner they do that, the sooner we are likely to see an end to the tragic war in Gaza.

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 assure our American colleague that we will certainly withdraw our troops from Ukraine after we have achieved all the goals of our special military operation. We have said repeatedly that we would prefer to resolve the conflict by peaceful diplomatic means. Unfortunately, in the current circumstances we cannot do that, owing among other things to the efforts of the United States, which continues to support the illegitimate Kyiv regime.

With regard to the situation related to Gaza, he can of course argue with me, and I have no objection to that. However, it is difficult to argue with the facts. Facts, as we know, are stubborn things. It is a fact that the United States has been assuring us for three months now that a deal is around the corner, but there is still no deal. And my United States colleague has still not bothered to explain to the Council how the parameters of the deal that were approved by resolution 2735 (2024) are being modified. This is the third time I have asked about it, but my requests have fallen on deaf ears. I hope that the third time will be the charm.

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

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor once again, Mr. President. I have

addressed this issue and other United States colleagues have addressed it before. I think everybody knows the difficulties of trying to reach the hostage-ceasefire agreement, so I am not going to sit here and once again spell those issues out. But I am going to say, as Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield said here just moments ago, that the diplomacy takes time. It is not easy. If it were easy, it would have been solved by now. We are therefore going to continue to work at it. We are not going to continue to cast blame, as some on the Council like to do every time they enter the Chamber. We are going to do the hard work of trying to get the deal done.

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 thank my American colleague for the clarification and ask whether his words mean that he supports the Council's collective efforts to ensure the implementation of resolutions that it has already adopted, including resolution 2735 (2024), by using all the tools that it has at its disposal.

The President: I propose that we move on with our agenda.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank you, Mr. President, and the Slovenian presidency of the Security Council, for your swift response to Algeria's request for convening this meeting in the light of the further deterioration of the grave situation and increasing civilian casualties in occupied Palestine — both the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem — at the hands of the illegal Israeli occupation. We also listened very carefully to the statements of the briefers.

Israel has unleashed a full-fledged war on the Palestinian people. It is seeking to impose a military solution to the conflict by making a nation disappear. There is no denying those facts. From genocide to apartheid, Israel is showing the world its willingness and readiness to use the most despicable means to achieve its colonial aims — dispossession, displacement, devastation, destruction and death. That is what it has been inflicting on Palestinians for decades, but our people are enduring it today at a scale never experienced since the Nakba. Instead of ending the

Nakba, Israel's fascist, extremist leaders have decided to try to bring it to its ultimate conclusion — Palestine with no Palestinians.

By now we should all be aware of those actions by the Israeli occupying authorities. Criticism and concerns alone have no bearing on a fanatical Government intent on committing the worst crimes over and over and over again. No one here is naive enough to believe that Israel will correct its course on its own and will suddenly respect international law. The members of the Council know the law and know that Israel is breaching it, flagrantly and shamelessly, every single day. The Council has condemned, called, urged and demanded, to no avail. It is time for resolute action. I totally agreed with you, Mr. President, when you described the tremendous amount of frustration, especially among the Palestinian people, seeing the Security Council and the international community failing them.

How can anyone justify sending weapons to an army that has been listed for its crimes against our children, or provide any kind of support to a Government that is pursuing annexation and genocide, denying the right of our people to self-determination and denying our nation and those who compose it their right to life? It cannot be justified, and therefore must not be. There must be no arms, no money, no trade and no shield to help Israel commit its crimes against the Palestinian people. In other words, there must be no complicity. The Council members cannot give inoculations and at the same time give weapons to kill the children inoculated against polio. There must be measures, sanctions, warrants, arrests and accountability — in other words, no impunity. That is the only way forward.

In recent days, Israel has killed more than 30 Palestinians in the West Bank, among them six children and two elderly people. It has destroyed refugee camps and civilian infrastructure, besieged and attacked hospitals and carried out countless air strikes. Jenin is a vivid example of that. The number of Palestinians killed since last October in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, stands at around 700, including more than 150 children, with the number of injured at 6,000. More than 3,300 Palestinians have been displaced and more than 12,000 arbitrarily detained. The hostages are enduring a never-ending nightmare. In parallel, Israel is advancing its settler-colonialist agenda with ever more settlers installed and ever more Palestinians displaced. Violence by settlers and soldiers is spreading like wildfire, with the aim of pushing people out of

their homeland. Israel wants the Council to believe that its military aggression is about security. But it knows from experience that it is actually creating conditions of insecurity. No one is naive enough to be ignorant of what this is about. It is about land. All Palestinians are guilty of being Palestinian and of wanting to live on their land — the land of their ancestors. They are being sentenced to ethnic cleansing, apartheid, arbitrary detention or death. How long will they have to suffer that terrifying fate?

Should we all pretend that we did not see the Knesset vote against a Palestinian State? That we did not see the acts of terror that Israeli settlers are perpetrating? That we did not see the Palestinian people being displaced over and over again? That we did not see the mass killings and destruction? That we did not see the map brandished by Netanyahu from which Palestine had disappeared? That we did not hear an Ambassador, seated at this table, calling resolution 2334 (2016) an evil decree and claiming that those who respect international law and the authority of the Council are terrorists? Should we pretend that we do not see how fanatical, how murderous, how crazy, how contemptuous the Israeli Government is?

Should we pretend that we have never heard of the Charter of the United Nations, of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, of the International Court of Justice's orders and advisory opinions, of the International Criminal Court and of every single body ever established to uphold the rule of law? Should we just ignore their unequivocal determinations regarding Israel's unlawful actions and their demands for an end to its human rights violations and war crimes? Should we allow Israel to continue its genocide against the Palestinian people while we pretend to negotiate a ceasefire?

The Council does not have to listen to me. It should listen to the families of the Israeli hostages. I am sure that in the past few days every Council member has been watching as CNN, the BBC and other channels report what the Israeli families are saying and what the entire Israeli population is doing, including in their hundreds of thousands in Tel Aviv. They know that Netanyahu does not care about the hostages — that is what they are saying — and does not want a deal. They know that so-called military pressure means genocide for innocent Palestinians and certain death for the Israeli hostages.

For months we have been making statements in which we have said that we need to spare the lives of civilians, Palestinian and Israeli. For months we have said that we want to see Palestinian and Israeli families reunited in life, not death. But Israel's colonial plans require death to prevail on both sides so as to convince everyone that no solution is possible and to ensure that there can never be two States or two peoples coexisting side by side. We must not let them prevail or we will all pay the price.

Palestinians in Gaza have endured pain and loss that cannot be described and whose magnitude cannot be comprehended. Our international humanitarian colleagues — the heroes who provide our people in the Gaza Strip with extraordinary services to keep them alive — are telling us that no matter how we describe the horror of Gaza to the Council, it is not the same as seeing it with one's own eyes. That is what they tell us and are telling Council members.

As Israel carries on with its genocidal onslaught, at every corner violence and death confront those who still survive. Starvation and disease hunt them down while trauma and despair besiege them, as they are displaced from bombed-out shelters to destroyed hospitals and then to mass graves. While we are grateful for the international mobilization — through the World Health Organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNICEF and other organizations — to stop the spread of polio among our children in Gaza, the fact remains that Israel's war machine continues undeterred, with its bombs and missiles killing and injuring people every day and its degradation of living conditions enabling other diseases to spread like wildfire. The vaccination campaign is an emergency undertaking, but it is not enough to stop the loss of life and suffering.

How much longer is the international community willing to pay the price for Israel's crimes? When will the time come when it insists that Israel pay the price — politically, morally and financially — for its illegal actions? When will the decision be taken to finally impose consequences for such defiance and criminality? When will the Council finally decide to impose a ceasefire? We totally agree with what you said several times in your statement, Mr. President, that we need a ceasefire now. That is what everyone is saying, not only the Palestinians but also the millions of Israelis who have taken to the streets and who care about their hostages. What they are telling their leadership, which

is not listening to them, is that it should agree to a ceasefire now, close the deal and accept the proposal on the table so that we can stop the killing and save everyone — the Israeli hostages and the Palestinian prisoners. Those are their words, not mine. It must happen now, because if it does not, only ruins and anger will remain. Every day that we fail so many innocent children, women and men, we are sentencing them to death. We must act to protect and save them. That is the only possible response and the only measure by which history will judge us.

We believe in the rule of law, in the sanctity of human life, in freedom and dignity and justice, in shared peace and security. We believe that nothing justifies harming civilians, nothing justifies harming prisoners, nothing justifies collective punishment and nothing justifies inflicting pain on children, regardless of their nationality, race or religion. Those are our beliefs. Those are our values. And we expect reciprocity, as Palestinians are not lesser beings.

In a few days all Council members will have a chance to send a clear signal that the unlawful Israeli occupation must end; that this colonial, supremacist rule will not be tolerated; that the rights of the Palestinian people must be respected in accordance with the determinations of the International Court of Justice, the highest court of the land, in accordance with the universal rules of international law. It will remind Council members of their obligation not to be complicit with that cruel occupation and to act decisively to bring it to an end and to do so as soon as possible.

Palestine remains the most important test for the international law-based order — a test it cannot afford to fail. When Council members vote in the General Assembly, which will be very soon, they must remember all those who were killed and all those who survived only to endure torment that no human being should endure. It is now or never. Either Council members stand up to those fanatics or they watch the fire devour everything in its path. They are either on the side of the arsonists or the firefighters. They cannot be on both sides. They cannot claim they want to extinguish the fire while providing what fuels it. They have to choose. And their choice will be remembered for decades to come and will affect the lives of millions. We implore them not to make the wrong choice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I would first like to thank the United States, the United Kingdom and France for calling this overdue meeting.

Carmel Gat was an occupational therapist from Tel Aviv. She was intending to begin a master's degree in October. She loved travel, music and meeting new people.

Eden Yerushalmi was 24 years old and a vibrant young woman with many friends and passions. She had two adoring sisters who looked up to her for everything. She weighed just 36 kilograms when her body was found.

Hersh Goldberg-Polin, an Israeli American was born in California and moved to Israel at age seven. He also loved travelling and music festivals, and his soccer team, Hapoel Jerusalem. He was working as a medic to save up for a trip to India.

Alexander Lobanov, an Israeli Russian, was holding onto the hope of meeting his second child with his wife, Michal, who gave birth while he was being held hostage — a child who will never meet his father.

Almog Sarusi was a Ra'anana native who loved travelling around Israel in his white jeep with his guitar and friends. He was a truly dedicated son, brother and friend.

Ori Danino saved many youngsters at the Nova Festival. He went back, turning his car around to go back and save lives. He loved nature and was a wonderful partner to Liel.

Those six beautiful, innocent, heroic souls were executed by Hamas, after more than 330 days of being held captive, deprived of sleep, food and sunlight — the most basic necessities. They dreamed of seeing their loved ones — parents, siblings, friends, their babies — again. Last week, Hamas terrorists executed all of them. They shot bullets in the back of each of their heads.

Hersh's mother, Rachel, spoke at his funeral on Monday. The only relief she could find was that her son was finally free. Think about that for a moment — a mother whose child has been murdered finding comfort only in the thought that he would no longer suffer at the hands of Hamas, that he was beyond the reach of the monsters who had taken him. That is not just grief; it is an agony no one could comprehend.

There are 101 human beings who remain captive, their cries for mercy ignored with international indifference. For nearly a year — 334 days — they have been held in the darkness. No sign of life has been communicated; no access granted to the Red Cross. They were forgotten and left to endure evil that we can barely grasp. The ones who have fortunately returned have exposed the ongoing torment the hostages still suffer on a daily basis, the ongoing atrocities.

Amit Soussana was dragged from her home by Hamas terrorists and sworn into a living hell. She was held in a child's bedroom, chained to the floor and at the mercy of her guard. He would enter the room, lift her shirt, touch her, grope her and dehumanize her in every way imaginable. One morning, as she tried to wash herself, chained in a bathroom, her guard stormed in, gun in hand, hitting her repeatedly and dragging her back to the bedroom where he forced himself on her. Amit was held for 55 days and nights before she was released. For others, that nightmare continues — day after day, night after night, with no hope. And Amit's story is not an isolated case.

Mia Regev, another freed hostage, testified that every woman held by Hamas has been sexually abused — every single one. She testified that every woman there experiences some form of sexual harassment. It does not matter how one tries to beautify or change it. Mia was held for 50 days, but there are women who have been held for much longer, women who have suffered that torture for almost a year, women who have been forgotten by the international community.

And then there is Agam Goldstein Almog, who was held in a terror tunnel when she was 17 years old, after witnessing the murder of her father and older sister. In that tunnel, she encountered six other female hostages. Those women told her how they were molested by armed men who entered the room where they were showering. Agam herself was told by a guard that she would live the rest of her life as a chained slave wife in Gaza.

What is happening now is unprecedented. We hear many voices demanding that we halt our efforts, lay down our weapons and question why we continue to fight Hamas in Gaza. The disconnect between the reality of 7 October, the massacre, the abductions and the current situation of the hostages in Gaza is impossible to comprehend.

Many Council members perhaps have forgotten why we are in Gaza, but we have not forgotten. We

remember the faces of the hostages, their families and their pleas to rescue them. That disconnect allows some Council members to behave as though 7 October never happened; as though there were no hostages, including babies — the Bibas family, and young girls in the hands of Hamas. We have not forgotten.

Today I am here to remind Council members and the world that we will never forget them. We will never abandon our sons, daughters, sisters and brothers who are being tortured by monsters. We will never stop until they are brought home. If the Security Council truly cared about the Palestinian people and truly wanted to achieve an end to this war that Hamas started, it would officially draft and adopt a resolution designating Hamas as a terrorist organization and condemning Hamas for its hostage taking. Let me be clear: Israel is committed to bringing every one of the hostages home. It is our top priority. But make no mistake, the roadblock to their release is not Israel, it is Hamas and only Hamas.

Three months ago, on 27 May, Israel, with the full backing of the United States, agreed to a hostage release deal. Hamas refused. Then, on 16 August, after the United States updated the deal framework, Israel once again agreed, and Hamas once again refused. Even in recent days and hours, as Israel has engaged in negotiations, Hamas has remained steadfast in its rejection of all proposals. Yet the international community continues to direct its pressure at us, at Israel, as though we were the ones holding the hostages, as though we were the ones standing in the way of their freedom. After all, it is far easier to criticize a democratic Government than to confront the reality of dealing with terrorists.

The terrorists do not sit at this table to defend their actions. They have proxies and apologists to do that for them. Where is the Council's outrage? Where is the Council's condemnation of Hamas for these atrocities? Hostage taking is a violation of international humanitarian law and of various Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2474 (2019). Hamas has violated three Council resolutions calling for the release of hostages. Yet, unless and until the Council condemns and pressures Hamas and designates it as what it is — a terrorist organization — the Council is failing its mandate.

We often discuss in the Chamber the involvement of United Nations agencies, as well as the aid and

support they are supplying to Gaza. But despite the many meetings held since 7 October, this is the first time we dedicate an important meeting to discuss the hostages. How many times in those meetings have we heard or has the Council demanded that the Red Cross access the hostages? How many times has the World Health Organization raised concerns for the health of the hostages? How many times has UNICEF called for aid to reach them? The double standard is unbearable.

Our Israel Defense Forces soldiers risk their lives to rescue hostages — Jews, Muslims and Christians alike. That is what we are doing. Take the brave rescue of an Israeli Bedouin hostage, Farhan Al-Qadi, by Israeli forces — a rescue that put our soldiers at great risk. Only in Israel would Jewish soldiers risk their lives to bring a Muslim Bedouin Israeli home to his family. Only in Israel, would an Orthodox Jewish doctor treat him with the utmost care. Only in Israel would his return be celebrated by Jews and Muslims alike. That is the difference between us and Hamas — we value life, we pray for life and we fight to protect it, while Hamas despises life, using it as a tool for its twisted ideology.

Today Israel mourns the six murdered hostages, but our fight is far from over. There are still 101 hostages

who remain in the clutches of Hamas, and we will not rest until they are brought home. I call on the Council to direct its energy where it is most needed: to support Israel, pressure Hamas and, for once, issue a clear and unequivocal condemnation of the barbaric terrorist organization that continues to hold innocent lives.

I again thank the Members of the Council that have demonstrated their moral clarity and humanity for the hostages. It is appreciated, but truthfully, it is not enough. Now is the time for action. Now is the time for the Security Council to adopt a clear and unequivocal resolution. That does not require long negotiations or deliberations. The Council has a moral obligation to adopt a simple resolution in which the Security Council condemns Hamas and its atrocities, designates it as a terrorist organization and demands the immediate release of the hostages. I cannot understand why any Council member would not raise their hand to vote for this language. Whoever cannot raise their hand in favour of such a resolution must be honest and ask themselves what they are doing here. It is very basic. This action is essential, this action is just, this action is moral.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.