Tough Compromises Vital to Salvaging Two-State Solution, Secretary-General Tells Security Council Debate on Crisis in Middle East

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Speakers Also Underline Urgency of Achieving Political Solution in Syria

The international community must do more to promote difficult compromises on the part of Israeli and Palestinian leaders in order to salvage the two-State solution to the Middle East conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the Security Council this morning.

“Both sides face difficult choices,” Mr. Ban said ahead of a day-long debate that heard from some 50 speakers and was presided over by the Nasser Judeh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Council President for April.  “But one choice stands above all:  whether to choose peace or the death, destruction and suffering that has defined the conflict for far too long,” Mr. Ban added.

Mr. Ban urged the incoming Israeli Government to reaffirm commitment to the two-State solution and take credible steps to foster an environment conducive to meaningful negotiations, including a freeze of settlement activity.  Welcoming the agreement reached last week to allow the transfer of more than $470 million in tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Ban urged a permanent resolution of that matter.  He also called for progress in Palestinian reconciliation and alleviation of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

In the West Bank, he expressed concern that clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians continued, along with the destruction of Palestinian-owned structures and increased administrative detentions.  Both sides needed to take constructive action along the lines of Israel’s recent approval of 2,500 housing units and public buildings for the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem.  “Such steps can help to reduce pressure.  But, they also need to lead to tangible results,” he said.

Following Mr. Ban’s statement, Palestinian and Israeli representatives took the floor.  The Observer of the State of Palestine regretted that appeals to the Security Council for serious action to end what she called “the longest occupation in modern history” had been thwarted, and called again for a resolution for that purpose.  “The failure to act has greatly fostered Israel’s impunity and compounded the conflict, with the heaviest price paid in human suffering and the credibility of the international system,” she said.  The crisis of the Palestinian people had become existential, given, not only Israeli actions, but also the assault on the Yarmouk camp in Syria, for which she called for relief.

Israel’s representative expressed dismay that his country remained the focus of attention in the region, given the widespread devastation, much of it fomented by Iran, which was also the sponsor of terrorist groups that surrounded Israel and continued to smuggle in arms to hide in civilian areas.  The conflict was not about borders, but about Israel’s right to exist.  Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas never supported a two-State solution when he spoke in Arabic, but of making an alliance with Hamas, which represented the extremism that threatened the world.  “Israel is on the frontline of this fight, but it is […] the fight of anyone who believes in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom,” he said.

In the discussion that followed, speakers agreed on the urgency of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a two-State solution.  Mr. Judeh said that it was imperative to stop finding reasons why a solution could not be reached and summon the will power to reach a timely settlement based on previous agreements, so that Israel became part of the region and could help face its current dire challenges in collective action.

In that light, some speakers called for a variety of action on the part of the Council, including a resolution to move negotiated progress forward.  Most speakers called for an end to settlement activities in the West Bank and for alleviating the situation in Gaza, with many also stressing the need to ensure Israel’s security.

Many speakers also underlined the urgency of achieving an inclusive political solution in Syria based on the Geneva talks.  Ending the suffering in Yarmouk and relief for Aleppo were also emphasized.  Acknowledging that Council efforts to stop the carnage in Syria had been stymied for years, New Zealand’s representative called on the full United Nations membership to actively contribute ideas to the body in the hope of finding an avenue to peace.

On Yemen, a number of speakers emphasized support for the Government that had been established as part of the transition process and for the implementation of Arab and Security Council resolutions and called for implementation of Gulf Council and Security Council initiatives.  Many also called for national dialogue in Libya and underscored the need to end suffering from the terrorism of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Sham (ISIL/ISIS) and other extremist groups in the region, with many distancing Islam from that scourge.

Also speaking today were the representatives of the United States, Malaysia, China, France, Lithuania, Venezuela, Chad, Angola, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, Chile, Spain, Nigeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Brazil, Syria, Guatemala, Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), South Africa, Pakistan, Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Namibia, Morocco, Bangladesh, Qatar, Turkey, Norway, India, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Japan, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Zimbabwe, Maldives and Sri Lanka, as well as the Holy See and the European Union.

The Chairperson of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People also made a statement today.

The meeting began at 10:20 a.m. and ended at 5:13 p.m.

Statements

BAN KI-MOON, United Nations Secretary-General, said that, after decades of conflict and missed opportunities, “the prospect of a two-State solution continues to recede, with potentially explosive consequences”.  He urged the incoming Israeli Government to reaffirm commitment to such a solution and take credible steps to foster an environment conducive to meaningful negotiations, including a freeze of settlement activity.  Welcoming the agreement reached last week to allow the transfer of more than $470 million in tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, he called for the parties to reach a sustainable solution on tax collection in line with the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords.

He said that seven months after his last visit to Gaza, he continued to be concerned by the fragile security situation there, the “crushing financial crisis” and extreme poverty, the pace of reconstruction and the lack of progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

He urged the international community to support a second humanitarian payment to Palestinian civil servants and stressed that the Government of National Consensus must assume its leadership of Gaza, including control of border crossings, with the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism continuing to be essential until arrangements fully compliant with Council resolutions are in place, having allowed transfer of construction materials to 70 per cent of households that needed it.  Israeli approval had been given to 60 of 130 projects funded by the international community, he added.

He again urged donors, however, to fulfil all pledges made in Cairo last October, as critical funding gaps threatened stability.  Humanitarian agencies were struggling to raise $720 million for temporary shelters for 100,000 internally displaced people and the World Food Programme (WFP) was on the verge of suspending its food assistance.  The water and energy supply was also “perilously unstable”, he said.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, he said, clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians continued, along with the destruction of Palestinian-owned structures.  Administrative detentions were increasing at an alarming pace.

“Such realities feed frustration and tension in a vicious cycle that undermines the path to peace,” he stated, urging both sides to take constructive actions such as Israel’s recent approval of a master plan for building 2,500 housing units and public buildings for the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem.  “Such steps can help to reduce pressure.  But, they also need to lead to tangible results,” he added.

In conclusion, he said that the international community must do more to promote difficult compromises on the part of Israeli and Palestinian leadership, in order to salvage the two-State solution to the Middle East conflict.  “Both sides face difficult choices.  But, one choice stands above all:  whether to choose peace or the death, destruction and suffering that has defined the conflict for far too long,” he stated.

FEDA ABDELHADY-NASSER, Observer of the State of Palestine, regretted that appeals to the Security Council for serious action to end what she called “the longest occupation in modern history” had been thwarted, the latest time on 30 December 2014.  “The failure to act has greatly fostered Israel’s impunity and compounded the conflict, with the heaviest price paid in human suffering and the credibility of the international system,” she said.  She added that the crisis of the Palestinian people had become existential, given the death, destruction, displacement, discrimination, denial of heritage and other consequences of the occupation, as well as the current assault on Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk camp in Syria by the “barbaric assault of ISIL [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Sham] terrorists”.

With the depth of the crisis so grave, she said, the Security Council’s deliberations on the situation must become urgent in order to bring about what she called the “globally endorsed” solution based on Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.  A meaningful resolution must be adopted and implemented for that purpose.  The situation on the ground must also change; the international community must urgently act to end what she called the illegal practices of the occupying Power, Israel, including settlement expansion and the blockade of Gaza, she stated, adding that 2014 witnessed the highest civilian death toll since the occupation began.  Concluding on the Yarmouk situation, she called for unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as swift and adequate donor support.  She affirmed the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to maintain the neutrality of the camps and refuse to be drawn into the conflict, supporting a political solution in Syria.

RON PROSOR (Israel) said that, since the Council’s last debate, the chaos in the region had only grown worse.  Another nation had been overrun by radical extremists — first Syria, then Iraq, then Libya and now Yemen.  “The extreme elements in our region have displayed a level of barbarism that is shocking even by Middle Eastern standards,” he said in that regard.  Arab leaders had joined forces, and Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen had hit humanitarian convoys, hospitals, schools and civilian neighbourhoods.  Asking why there were no Human Rights Council condemnations or a Commission of Inquiry, he said that, when Israel was at the heart of the crisis, “the Arabs don’t miss a beat”.  However, “when fingers cannot be pointed at Israel, some Arab nations are downright heartless”, he said.  Iran was more dangerous than ever before; it was not only a threat to Israel or to the Middle East, but to the entire world.  “Iran is the engine of aggression behind chaos in our region,” he said, noting that it had supplied Hizbullah with over 120,000 missiles that it hid in civilian neighbourhoods.  Iranian-sponsored terrorist groups surrounded Israel.  As Iranian influence spread, so did tyranny, subjugation and terrorism.

He said Hamas continued to abuse its people and wage war against Israel.  Earlier this month, Israeli authorities revealed that Hamas was using the Kerem Shalom crossing to hide tons of dual-use items inside shipments of humanitarian goods.  No United Nations official had reported any of those developments.  With regards to the Palestinian leadership, President Abbas claimed to support the two-State solution, but the message got lost in translation because “you will never hear him make this claim in Arabic”.  President Abbas insisted that Palestinian refugees be allowed to flood the Jewish State; he also claimed to oppose terrorism, but his Government had forged a pact with a terrorist organization, paid salaries to convicted terrorists and incited violent attacks against Israelis.  Month after month, individuals on the Council argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a territorial dispute that could be resolved by addressing its “root causes”.  The truth was that the conflict was not about the right place for Israel’s borders, but about Israel’s right to exist in the first place.  It was time to focus global attention where it belonged — on terrorists and their sponsors.  “Israel is on the frontline of this fight, but it is not just Israel’s fight; it is the fight of anyone who believes in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom,” he said.

NASSER JUDEH, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Affairs of Jordan and Security Council President, speaking in his national capacity, said that, at this time of daunting challenges in the Middle East it was more urgent than ever that a Palestinian State be established in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and other international agreements.  Jordan was not a mere observer, but had direct interest in the achievement of peace through meaningful, time-bound negotiations that tackled all difficult issues.  His country would also continue its efforts to protect all holy places in Jerusalem.

Noting that most Palestinian refugees were Jordanian citizens, he said that the amounts spent by his country for their support had exceeded the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to which he paid tribute and for which he called for adequate support.  He also called for lifting the blockade on Gaza, greater support for reconstruction and for ending settlement activities in the West Bank.  As Council President, his country would pursue all means of engendering earnest negotiations towards the two-State solution.  Directly addressing the Israeli representative, he said that the region was never short of reasons not to do things, but it was imperative to find the will power, good intensions and putting aside differences through a time-bound process, so that Israel became part of the region and could help face its challenges through collective action.

Turning to Syria, he underlined the urgency of achieving an inclusive political solution based on the Geneva talks and stopping the spread of terrorism from that conflict.  On Yemen, he emphasized his country’s support for the Government that was part of the transition process and implementation of Arab and Security Council resolutions and called for implementation of Gulf Council and Security Council initiatives.  On Libya, he supported efforts for national dialogue.  In all areas, he stressed the threat of terrorist bands who had been hijacking Islam, which, he emphasized, was innocent of their activities.  Collective action against the terrorists must include military action, as well as religious and cultural initiatives, along with efforts to redress economic inequality and social imbalances.  He supported Iraq’s efforts to overcome its crises in that regard.  On Iran, he looked for an agreement that consolidated peace and security in the region and internationally.

SAMANTHA POWER (United States) cited several recent attacks on Israeli soldiers, medics and civilians that showed the “persistent and deadly tensions” in the region.  The United States remained committed to a two-State solution that could bring lasting peace and stability to both Israelis and Palestinians.  It was the best path forward for Israel’s security, the achievement of Palestinians’ aspirations and peace in the region.  Commending the parties for having reached agreement on the transfer of revenues, she encouraged efforts to disburse funds committed in Cairo in 2014.  On the already desperate situation in Yarmouk, which had worsened in recent weeks, she said that civilians were trapped between warring parties that showed a callous disregard for human life.  “Siege is a tactic we see across Syria”, used by both Assad and terrorist groups, she said.  Both groups used the suffering of civilians as a tool to advance their position or undermine that of their opponents.  Such actions must stop.  “All civilians who want to leave besieged areas must be allowed to do so immediately,” she said, stressing that relocation from Yarmouk must be allowed.  Furthermore, the Council must investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria immediately.  Last week, Council members heard first-hand from a doctor who had treated victims from a chlorine attack.  “If we members are appalled at hearing such accounts […] we must channel our indignation into stopping more attacks like it from occurring,” she said, including by no longer propping up the regime and by implementing relevant Council resolutions that had already been adopted.  The only viable solution was one without Assad in power.

SITI HAJJAR ADNIN (Malaysia), associating herself with the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said Israel continued to chip away the conditions for a two-State solution with its illegal settlement expansion.  There had been “no real action” to halt the emerging one-State reality, including by the Council, and the time had come for it to lead the way in ending the status quo.  “Isn’t it time for the Council to act decisively on the creation of a Palestinian State, just as the General Assembly did in 1947 to create the State of Israel?”, she asked.  Noting that 300 Palestinian children had been detained in the West Bank, she said the number of child detainees had increased by 87 per cent over the past three years.  Israel’s juvenile military court — the only one in the world — violated the Convention on the Rights of the Child and she urged Israel’s adherence to that instrument.  Palestine’s accession to the Rome Statute would “go a long way” to end impunity.

LIU JIEYI (China) said that the question of Palestine was at the core of the state of affairs in the Middle East.  Both parties to that conflict should adhere to the strategic choice for peace talks; in addition, the creation of an independent State of Palestine was “the only way out” for both countries.  China hoped that Israel would stop building new settlements and lift its blockade on Gaza.  Israel’s legitimate security concerns should also be addressed. The Council should play a larger role in promoting peace talks and promoting reconstruction in Gaza.  Moreover, the international community should “widen its vision” with regard to the Middle East, and relevant organizations should be encouraged to step up to move the situation in the right direction.  The humanitarian situation in Gaza must be addressed immediately, including by fulfilling financial commitments to bridge the funding gap.  China firmly supported the people of Palestine and their rights, he said, and it was open to all initiatives that would restart peace talks.  China had engaged actively with both parties to promote peace, and would continue to do so.  Turning to the Syrian crisis, he said that the matter had greatly threatened international peace and stability.  China welcomed efforts by Egypt and the Russian Federation, among others, to address that crisis, and called on all States to support a prompt ceasefire and a settlement plan.

FRANÇOIS DELATTRE (France) said that the option of a two-State solution was “fading away”.  “The political vacuum fuels the risk of explosion”, he said, adding that there was an urgent need to put an end to the negative spiral.  The Council must reiterate its commitment to the two-State solution, and find new pathways to create a Palestinian State.  It was in no one’s interest for security cooperation to halt, and no one wished to see covert diplomatic wars.  Only a strengthened and renewed international commitment would allow parties to take the difficult path to peace.  A change of method was needed.  France had made efforts to mobilize the Council last autumn, and had had to wait, given the Israeli elections.  However, “there will always be good reasons to beat around the bush”, he said in that regard.  Instead of managing the situation with temporary solutions, action was needed.  The international community must act collectively, and the Council should bring in more partners, including the European Union and the Arab League, among others.  That did not mean imposing a solution on the parties, but creating a framework for talks.  “Let us be clear:  there cannot be a Palestinian State or peace in the Middle East without strengthened international commitment”, he concluded, stressing that the Council must shoulder its responsibilities to those ends.

RAIMONDA MURMOKAITĖ (Lithuania), associating herself with the European Union, said the political and security situation in the Middle East had rarely been more dramatic, amid the Syrian Government’s failure to protect its people and to instead wage war.  Humanitarian access there was lacking, with resolutions 2139 (2013), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) largely unimplemented.  “Four long years of the Syria crisis increasingly question the credibility of this Council”, she said, pressing it to “stand united” behind the Special Envoy to come up with solutions.  In addition, the Council must do everything to prevent Yemen from falling into sectarian strife, civil war and fragmentation.  In Iraq, citing Da’esh violence against Christian graveyards, and destruction of historic shrines, such as Khorsabad and Nineveh, she said grievances preceding that onslaught should not be compounded by new abuses of Sunni communities.  There was no other solution to the Middle East peace process than an immediate resumption of negotiations that sought a final political settlement.  She urged support for Lebanon’s policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis, calling for implementation of all Council resolutions.

RAFAEL RAMIREZ (Venezuela), supporting the statement to be made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the root cause of all the conflicts in the region, with Palestinians suffering from a process of expulsion and other illegal Israeli practices since 1948.  The continuation of the Israeli settlement detention policies were particularly egregious, as was what he called Israel’s impunity, which he said was eroding the Council’s credibility.  He called on the Council to act decisively to end the occupation and bring about a Palestinian State based on previous agreements within a prescribed timeline, and to recognize Palestine as a state with full United Nations membership privileges.

MAHAMAT ZENE CHERIF (Chad) also criticized Israel’s occupation and the practices carried out under it, as well as statements by Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu seeming to dismiss hope for a two-State solution.  The Council must, therefore, act to save the two-State solution based on previous agreements, as the only way for Palestinians to satisfy their right to self-determination and for Israelis to achieve security.  A time-bound plan must be put into place to restart meaningful negotiations toward that end.  On Syria, he expressed growing concern over the humanitarian consequences of the long-continuing conflict.  The tragic situation begged for additional action by the international community, including greater aid to the population.  Innovative ideas and the use of influence by other actors were needed to move the political process forward.

JULIO HELDER DE MOURA LUCAS (Angola) said that achievement of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement would go a long way to help stabilize the Middle East and stem the breeding of extremism there.  After the collapse of United States-sponsored mediation efforts, the Council should uphold its responsibilities and use its stature to help end the conflict.  Only a united Council, acting as an honest broker had the requisite power to do that, he stressed.  The great Powers in particular should use their influence to move the parties to negotiate seriously.  His country was ready to support any initiative that could lead to positive steps towards finally realizing the two-State solution and ending the deprivation of the Palestinian people.  For that purpose, he called on both sides to make the necessary, difficult choices.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) said that it was clear that the Arab Spring was no longer a democratic rebuilding, but had led to crises in a number of States where events had taken a violent and unpredictable turn.  Intervention in Middle Eastern affairs and support for regime change had led to destabilization.  There was a need to shore up international efforts to combat terrorism, which should be based on international law under the aegis of the Security Council.  The Russian Federation was interested in a democratic and prosperous Middle East; unlike other countries, it drew no benefit from chaos and destabilization.  A fair solution of the longstanding conflict would foster general stabilization in the Middle East and North Africa, he said, adding that his country stood ready to work to those ends, including through the work of the Quartet.  There was an urgent need to move forward on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative.  It was clear that, without stepping up contact between the Government and the moderate opposition, no progress would be made.  Recalling the recent inter-Syrian consultations, he said that the primary result of the last round of those consultations was agreement on “the Moscow Platform”.  He hoped that the dynamism of the Moscow meeting would continue to be drawn upon.

MARK LYALL GRANT (United Kingdom) recalled that last month had marked the start of the fifth year of the Syrian conflict.  Bashar al-Assad continued to kill and maim his own people, and “Syria is now a shell of its former self”.  His country was concerned about the fate of civilians in Yarmouk, where thousands had been living under siege for nearly two years with little access to humanitarian assistance.  Overall, more than 440,000 Syrians were currently under siege by both Assad and ISIL; in that regard, he called on all groups to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access.  Neither side could win on the battlefield.  It remained clear that Assad could play no part in Syria’s future.  The $3.6 billion pledged in Kuwait went a long way towards fulfilling the needs of Syrians in 2015.  In that respect, he urged all States to disburse their pledges promptly.  On the Palestinian question, he said that serious negotiations towards a deal were needed.  A durable ceasefire was necessary in Gaza and donors should deliver on their pledges as soon as possible.  Both parties must think seriously about how they could work together to improve the realities on the ground; Israel must stop its “illegal and totally unnecessary” settlement building; meanwhile, Palestine must realize that there could be no substitute for dialogue with Israel.  There was merit to the Council’s greater involvement to those ends, he said.

CRISTIÁN BARROS MELET (Chile) said that “we find ourselves at a very disturbing moment” with new conflicts arising across the Middle East, as well as old conflicts that had not yet been resolved.  The status quo was unacceptable.  The peace process must be relaunched within defined parameters, and the Council had a major role to play in that process.  A commitment was needed from the parties, who must adopt confidence-building measures and do away with extremist rhetoric.  Further, a peace process was not viable if the Israeli settlement policy continued.  He appealed to the international community not to disregard the humanitarian situation of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and in the Yarmouk camp, among other troubled locations.  He reiterated his country’s gratitude for humanitarian measures undertaken by Lebanon and other countries of the region.  The conflict in Syria had spread, and new measures must be taken to protect the most vulnerable.  Those responsible must be held to account and a political solution was needed with a view towards the future.

JIM MCLAY (New Zealand) said a chorus was calling for a political solution to the situation in Syria, and with Yarmouk resembling a death camp, that refrain was just as important — and difficult — to achieve.  He supported efforts by the Russian Federation and Egypt to reinvigorate a political track, noting that all such efforts should be coordinated under the United Nations and based on the Geneva communiqué.  He requested proposals on pragmatic next steps the Council could take to foster a lasting solution.  On the Middle East peace process, he supported the idea of a balanced resolution, pressing the Council to use its moral and legal authority, and tools at its disposal, to shift the dynamics back to productive negotiations.  New Zealand was working on a text that could help restart talks, which would require both sides to “step back” from their preferred outcomes.  With France working on a “parameters resolution”, and comments from the region that a second text would complicate the process, New Zealand was prepared to wait and see how current efforts played out.  It stood ready to ensure that the next resolution had a genuine chance of bring parties back to the table.  “We have the blueprints — the Geneva communiqué for Syria and decades of work on the Middle East peace process,” he said.  “What is left is for this Council to act.”

ROMÁN OYARZUN MARCHESI (Spain) said the two-State solution put into place in Madrid decades ago risked becoming an unrealizable chimera at a time when it was ever more clear that was the only way of securing peace and security in the region.  Greater efforts must be made to restore trust between the parties through gestures aimed at relaunching the peace process.  He expressed hope that the new Israeli Government would show goodwill by changing its settlement policies and the Palestinians would be able to form a Government of national unity.  With a 47 per cent unemployment rate in Gaza, it was important to restore hope among the people there.  The international community must work towards ensuring the lifting of the blockade and fulfil its pledges.  The path was clear:  the end of the occupation and the creation of a viable Palestinian State.  The Council’s goal should be to achieve consensus on a framework of revitalizing a negotiated settlement.  Urging the body to work towards extinguishing the flames of violent extremism, he called on members to ensure stability in Lebanon.  Efforts towards finding a solution in Syria needed to be continued through the genuine cooperation of all parties, while ensuring full humanitarian access to the people in need.  On Yemen, the Houthis continued to defy the international community as the humanitarian situation deteriorated, he said, stressing that the Council may have to adopt further measures.

U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria) said the prolonged stalemate on the Israeli-Palestinian front was a source of profound international concern and urged the parties to resume the peace process based on the established framework.  Her country unequivocally supported a two-State solution and stressed the need for greater international engagement in that end.  Only a fraction of the funds pledged for the reconstruction of Gaza had been disbursed, which was impeding efforts to ameliorate the situation on the ground.  In Yemen, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners worked in extreme conditions to provide relief to people in need.  As a negotiated settlement was the only solution there, all parties should return to the table and work towards creating a peaceful, united and culturally diverse Yemen.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said that, with 2,314 Palestinians and 87 Israelis killed, 2014 had witnessed the highest death toll since 1967.  The same year, Gaza had seen the highest rate of internal displacement, and the Israeli Government had set a 10-year record for the number of tenders issued for settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.  In 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had said during his electoral campaign that a Palestinian State would not be established “on his watch”, and had vowed to increase settlement construction in East Jerusalem by thousands of housing units.  Indeed, the situation in the Middle East was becoming more and more difficult, but that was no excuse for inaction.  On the contrary, the more difficult a situation became, the greater the responsibility of the Council.  Any resumption of negotiations on the Middle East conflict should be based on well-defined parameters, and a new comprehensive international framework, as well as clear and agreed upon deadlines, were needed.  The Council should shoulder its responsibilities by addressing those critical issues sooner rather than later.

AMR ABOULATTA (Egypt), citing sceptical voices that were refusing a two-State solution to the Middle East conflict, said the international community lacked the political will to achieve that settlement, most recently seen in December.  The failure to establish regional peace was not an option, as such despair would turn Palestinian territories into fertile ground for ISIL and other groups to prosper.  Palestinians had been victims of ISIL in Yarmouk.  After six decades of the crisis, “we are fed up with the wasted opportunities”, he said, cautioning against repeating the same mistakes in rounds of “useless” talks.  The international community should not just watch as one party showed unwillingness to establish a settlement.  He urged building on the Arab Peace Initiative.  “What are we waiting for to establish peace?,” he asked, citing an infringement upon the “lofty” aims on which the United Nations had been created.  He commended France’s tabling of a draft resolution to reactivate the peace process.  Gaza was part-and-parcel of Palestinian territories and he urged participants at the Cairo conference to fulfil their pledges for assistance.  In Syria, Egypt was providing political support to parties willing achieve a political solution.

ABDALLAH AL-MOUALLIMI (Saudi Arabia), speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), welcomed Palestine’s decision to join the International Criminal Court and looked forward to it becoming a full United Nations member.  An accountability framework must be established for Israelis responsible for confiscating Palestinian tax revenues and other violations.  That came in the context of Israel’s unwillingness to honour its commitments, violations of international law and hampering of negotiations towards a settlement.  The Israeli Prime Minister rejected the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, he said, calling on all countries to acknowledge a Palestinian State based on 4 June 1967 borders.  OIC was committed to Palestinians’ rights and the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.  He called upon the international community to end Israel’s occupation and to achieve peace based on the two-State solution.  Israel had carried out a policy of Palestinian deportation and others aimed at impunity.  Their troops had detained Palestinians, including parliamentarians, without charge, and he condemned its attacks on both Islamic and Christian places of worship.  The situation in Gaza was deteriorating, due to Israel’s blockade and aggression last summer, and the Council should press Israel to end that blockade and implement resolution 1860 (2009).  “You have to move in order to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people,” he stressed.

In his national capacity, he called the situation in Syria “the biggest catastrophe of the century”, as Syrian authorities continued to carry out crimes against their people and use chemical weapons.  They continued to cooperate with terrorist organizations to massacre people at Yarmouk, and continued to hamper humanitarian relief.  The Council had pledged to take measures in the event that such weapons were used.  Such practices by the Syrian authorities only helped terrorists to expand inside the country.  Condemning terrorism in all its forms, regardless of its perpetrators, he said the roots must be addressed, including Syrian authorities’ oppression.  Saudi Arabia would exert all efforts to help Syrians achieve their aspirations in a way that respected the country’s integrity.  The Council should implement its resolutions, including the Geneva statement, and it was time for the body to prove that Israel was not above the law.

GUILHERME DE AGUIAR PATRIOTA (Brazil) said statements by Israeli leaders that there was no near-term prospect for a Palestinian State were appalling and only fuelled mistrust.  The international community must take act to bring about a negotiating process that led to a two-State solution, and the Council must play its role in developing a “new peace architecture” for ending the conflict and set parameters for relaunching the peace process.  The State of Palestine’s accession to the Rome Statute helped to fight impunity and he urged Israel to release all financial resources due to Palestine.  On Syria, he condemned killings and other human rights violations by the so-called “Islamic State” and Al-Nusra Front in the Yarmouk camp, urging parties to comply with their international humanitarian law obligations.  The escalation of violence in Lebanon reinforced the need to support its policy of disassociation from regional crises, while in Iraq, a strategy focused only on military operations would not address the root causes of terrorism in the country.  He urged parties in Yemen to cease hostilities and supported the Council’s efforts to “act decisively” in helping to restore stability.

BASHAR JA’AFARI (Syria) said he was appalled by how Israel continued pursuing its illegal and racist occupation of Arab lands in the face of successive United Nations resolutions reflecting the international community’s collective abhorrence.  He asked if more commissions were needed to establish that Israel’s apartheid-like policies were morally and legally untenable.  Israel was able to pursue its illegitimate and abusive policies against Arab peoples because certain powerful countries were shielding it.  Even today, some speakers made “fictitious” statements about Syria in a clear effort to distract attention from Israel.  If the representatives of the United States and United Kingdom were really interested in the welfare of the Palestinian people, their Governments would not have continued to protect Israel at every step.  Criticizing the “threats” the representative of Saudi Arabia made against Syria, he said that country and Zionism were the root causes of extremism and instability in the region.

FERNANDO CARRERA CASTRO (Guatemala) said the fallout from the violence in the region had put civilian populations in extreme danger.  The international community had borne witness to the reality that a political model which fostered terrorism, extremism, poverty and exclusion was no longer relevant.  The Council must redouble its efforts to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, while the parties concerned must desist from detrimental activities and build trust towards achieving a two-State solution.  Condemning violence committed by all parties in Syria, he commended the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Special Envoy towards a political settlement.  The humanitarian situation in Syria was particularly concerning and funding inadequate to meet the needs on the ground.  While the State had the primary responsibility for protecting civilians, the international community needed to work harder to ensure that all parties fulfilled their obligations.

GHOLAMALI KHOSHROO (Iran), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, stressed the urgency of achieving a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was a priority for the Movement, as Israel’s illegal policies continued to undermine the resumption of negotiations.  He expressed grave concern at the deterioration in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which required immediate international attention.  Last year, Israel’s military aggression in Gaza had reached a new apex and he called for accountability for all such violations, as well as the fulfilment of pledges made at the Cairo Conference for Palestine in order to accelerate Gaza’s reconstruction.  Condemning Israel’s settlement construction, he said those and other systematic violations had worsened conditions for Palestinians.  The Council must take “resolute” action to end the Israeli occupation, he said, expressing regret that it had failed last year to meaningfully contribute to a peaceful solution in the Middle East.  Israel continued to violate Lebanese airspace contravening resolution 1701 (2006), which should be implemented.  He condemned Israel’s measures to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, demanding its adherence to resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw from that area.

MAHLATSE MMINELE (South Africa), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the time to act was long overdue, with the illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip causing suffering for 1.8 million Palestinians.  He reiterated deep concern that the solution envisioned by the Oslo Accords was “being taken apart piecemeal” with every new settlement announced.  Those settlements were not only illegal under international law but hampered peace.  Their construction confiscated Palestinian territory and sought to isolate East Jerusalem from other Palestinian cities.  They threatened the two-State solution.  He called on Israel to stop its settlement activities, saying its actions in Gaza also violated international humanitarian law.  The Council had failed to hold Israel responsible for violating its decisions, which enabled Israel’s impunity.  He expressed hope that the agreement to release revenues and customs duties withheld from the Palestinian Authority would be implemented, reiterating that withholding tax revenue was an illegal collective punishment.  Palestine, as a State, had the right to join any organization and South Africa would support its application to the United Nations.

MALEEHA LODHI (Pakistan) said that until the chaos in the Middle East was contained and controlled, it would endanger global peace, security and prosperity.  In many ways, Palestine and the plight of its people remained the root cause of conflict and chaos in the region.  Sadly, today, the prospect of a just solution was further away than at any time, and the recent pronouncements by Israel had appalled “even its closest friends”.  The Council bore the responsibility to act with vigour and unanimity to enforce its resolutions demanding a just and durable settlement.  The body should adopt a resolution establishing the parameters of the Palestinian State, set a timeline for ending occupation and launch a new peace process to take negotiations forward.  On Libya, tribal and regional rivalries had combined with extremist militants, including ISIS affiliates, to generate conditions of chaos.  He called on the Council to ensure action by those in a position to contribute to restoring peace and order in that country.  In Syria, ISIS must be defeated and a political solution was needed between those willing to make mutual accommodations.  Finally, in Yemen, a rebel group with the aid of dissident leaders had occupied large parts of the country; that situation, created by illegal force, could not be allowed to stand, much less be accepted as the basis for negotiating a settlement of the crisis.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of Delegation of the European Union, urged a solution to the conflict that would see Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign State of Palestine living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.  He called on parties to renew their commitment to the two-State solution, and the Quartet to facilitate a peace process, supporting the Council’s efforts to “find common ground” on a resolution conveying an “authoritative” message about the framework within which to reach agreement.  Last week, the bloc appointed its Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, who would help set up a possible new framework.  The Union was committed to achieving peace in Syria, Iraq and the region, as well as to countering the ISIL/Da’esh threat, and to that end, adopted on 16 March conclusions on a regional strategy.  The political process in Syria must be revived, prospects advanced for a political transition — based on the 2012 Geneva Communiqué — and conditions in the Yarmouk camp urgently addressed.  The European Commission released €2.5 million in emergency funding for UNRWA, he said, condemning the regime of Bashar al-Assad for its “intransigence” on humanitarian access.

RICARDO ALDAY GONZÁLEZ (Mexico) said the ongoing crises in the region underscored the urgency of reaching a comprehensive series of settlements that promoted stability, security and development.  Violence and deprivation could not be the common denominator of a region that had contributed so much to humanity.  Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip depended not only on a political process, but also unfettered access for humanitarian workers.  Mexico supported a comprehensive two-State solution, he said, expressing hope that the new Israeli Government would take steps towards that end.  The international community could not remain a passive actor while the root causes of conflict persisted.  The swift deterioration of the crisis in Yemen and Syria reinforced the need for more robust international action on reaching an inclusive political settlement.  The use of chemical weapons in Syria was not only a violation of international law, but also an unacceptable blot on contemporary history.  Condemning the atrocities and abuses committed by terrorist and extremist groups, he urged the international community to step up efforts to boost tolerance and harmony across the region.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba), associating himself with the Non-aligned Movement, said the situation in the Middle East was a challenge to the international community’s collective will to act.  Israel’s continued aggressions against the Palestinian people were unacceptable, he said, urging the Council to adopt a far-reaching resolution with the aim of reaching a comprehensive two-State solution.  The undemocratic practice of using the veto to block meaningful action in the Council must stop.  Peace in Syria would only be possible through a political settlement based on dialogue, he said, adding that those seeking regime change were responsible for the loss of life and the massive destruction there.  Some countries sought to separate the humanitarian situation from the political situation in order to prolong the crisis.  The Syrian Government had shown its willingness to bring about peace and deserved the international community’s support.  The Council had a crucial role to play if the world were to deliver its often-repeated commitments on peace, security and development.

FODÉ SECK, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, condemned the attack by ISIL against the Yarmouk camp, and stressed that the affected residents deserved the Council’s full attention and support.  That attack demonstrated once again the vulnerable situation of Palestinian refugees.  The war last summer had left the Gaza Strip in a fragile state, he said; in that regard, a symposium had been held in Vienna on relief, recovery and rebuilding in Gaza, bringing together representatives of States and other stakeholders.  While the pace of the process was too slow, the implementation of the tripartite mechanism for the reconstruction of Gaza continued, he said, stressing nonetheless that the international community had a responsibility to respond to the most pressing needs of Gaza’s people.  In that vein, participants at the Vienna symposium had called on States to release funds pledged and called on Israel to lift its blockade.  The Committee noted with satisfaction that Israel had reversed its decision to withhold revenue from Palestine, and added that it should lift all punitive measures.  Regarding Israel’s “rampant” settlement activities in the West Bank, and to the occupation in general, he called on the new Israeli Government to end one of the most “flagrant” violations of human rights of the twentieth century.  Finally, he stressed the need to ensure that Council resolutions on Palestine were implemented by a pre-agreed deadline, and reiterated his support for a two-State solution.

JUAN CARLOS MENDOZA-GARCÍA (Costa Rica) said that, as a peace-loving country, Costa Rica condemned the escalation of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.  In that regard, he urged a return to negotiations on the grass-roots issues of the conflict based on previous agreements.  His country welcomed the fact that Palestine had recently acceded to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; the role of international bodies such as the Court was crucial to upholding international law.  He noted with alarm that the situation in Yemen posed a threat to international peace and stability, and called for an immediate ceasefire.  The humanitarian situation was critical and more resources would soon be needed.  For its part, the Council had adopted resolution 2216 (2015), which imposed an arms embargo, and which had stressed that the solution in Yemen must be a political one.  There should be full respect for international humanitarian law, and full protection of civilians.  In order to avoid a degradation of the conflict in Syria, the international community must seek a political solution in line with the terms adopted by the Syria Action Group.  He appealed to all parties to that conflict to adhere to international law and called on the Syrian State to protect its people.

WILFRIED I. EMVULA (Namibia), associating herself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said “it goes without saying that the Security Council holds the key to peace in the Middle East”.  Israeli settlements were at the centre of many human rights violations and could kill the prospects for peace.  Israel must end its demolition of Palestinian homes in response to alleged violence by Palestinians in that country, she said, expressing concern over Israel’s “non-applicability” of the Palestinian National Covenant to the Occupied Territories.  She was also concerned that Israel continued to deny entry into the West Bank and Gaza by the Human Rights Council’s Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Gaza Conflict.  Reminding the Council of its duty to stop Israel’s settlement expansion in the West Bank, she urged the international community to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian State along 1967 borders.  She also called for resumed negotiations and donor funding to accelerate the reconstruction of Gaza.

OMAR HILALE (Morocco) said that he had called on the international community to provide more support to UNRWA following the failure of United States-sponsored mediation efforts to resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the devastation in Gaza.  Israeli settlement activity and threats to the holy sites must end, he added, relaying the outcome of regional meetings that had called for a timely achievement of a two-State solution based on the Arab Peace Initiative.  Ending such activity and threats was the only way to resolve the intolerable situation.  Decrying the rise of extremist groups in the region, he called for international efforts to root out terrorism and to resolve the situation in Libya, where Morocco had pledged to host a meeting of all factions to support United Nations efforts for a political solution.  On Yemen, he welcomed the latest Council resolution and reiterated support for the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.  On Syria, his Government supported negotiations involving all parties and was providing extensive humanitarian aid.

ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh) expressed regret that the “appalling” human rights and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian territories and repeated appeal of the international community to improve the deteriorating conditions went unheeded.  He deplored Israel’s policies of collective punishment and said that all settlement construction was illegal under international law and must be halted immediately.  Such policies constituted breaches of the fourth Geneva Convention and war crimes under article 8 of the Rome Statute.  He appreciated that the Palestine Authority had joined the International Criminal Court to seek justice for its people.  While pleased that the Israeli Government was to release three months of tax revenue it had collected on behalf of the Authority, he said the practice of withholding tax revenue was a punitive measure meant to undermine it.  He urged Israel to fulfil its obligations, as the occupying Power, among them to ensure that all inhabitants were safeguarded against violence or threats; cease illegal detentions; open all border crossings; and withdraw all settlers from occupied land.

ALYA AHMED SAIF AL-THANI (Qatar) said that the Middle East was undergoing accelerated changes, but what had not changed was the lack of a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian question.  However, the two-State solution — and an end to the Israeli occupation — enjoyed wide international support.  Many States had recognized the State of Palestine, which had also recently joined the Rome Statute.  Mechanisms were needed to make the two-State solution binding upon the occupying Power.  Turning to the Syrian crisis, which had claimed the lives of a quarter of a million people, she said that the crisis had most affected those under siege by the regime and ISIL.  People in those areas faced death by starvation and the lack of drugs and medical care.  The residents of Yarmouk, who already faced a declining humanitarian situation, now also faced attacks by ISIL.  Continued silence concerning the crimes that prevented the delivery of food and medical aid was a “green light” for more crimes.  Qatar had launched a fund for the education and vocational development of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons that sought to diffuse the radicalization of those young people.  The solution to the Syrian crisis should be based on the Geneva communiqué and should meet the aspirations of the Syrian people.  Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in that country must be held to account.

HALI ÇEVIK (Turkey) said that the Middle East was undergoing a period of drastic change which affected the region and beyond.  The devastating effects of last year’s destruction of Gaza still persisted.  Turkey had offered more than $90 million in humanitarian aid in that respect.  Israel’s continuous illegal blockade which undermined international efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza must be lifted.  Achieving a two-State solution and ending the longest occupation in recent history continued to be a priority.  The historical injustice against the Palestinian people, exacerbated by continued Israeli settlement activity, was fuelling hatred and radicalization in the region and beyond.  Israel must prove its commitment to a two-State solution, he said, adding that it was “high time” for the international community to intensify its efforts towards a Council resolution setting a timetable and parameters for the implementation of a two-State solution.  Recent developments in the region showed that multiple crises were interlinked.  For example, the Syrian crisis had become a source of distress for the Palestinians; meanwhile, the suffering of the Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk was exacerbated by the attack by Da’esh.  Turkey had now become the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, he said, reminding countries that collective burden-sharing was the responsibility of all. He expressed his support for Iraq’s efforts to combat militants, as well as concerns about the situation in Yemen and Libya.

GEIR PEDERSEN (Norway) affirmed that there was simply no other option than the two-State solution to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiations towards that end must be resumed.  He/ appealed to the new Israeli Government to reaffirm a clear commitment to the two-State concept and to stop settlement activity until borders have been agreed upon.  He appealed to the Palestinian leadership to form a unified and coherent administration that unequivocally upholds previous agreements and respected Israel’s right to exist.  The international community should stand ready to assist the parties within the framework of a modified peace architecture.  Outlining recent activities of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee on Palestinian institution-building, he called for donors to redouble their efforts, stating that the financial situation of the Palestinian Authority continued to deteriorate and Gaza could not be left in its current condition.  All regional and international actors should intensify efforts to find political solutions to Syria and all other conflicts in the region.

ASOKE K. MUKERJI (India) adding his voice to others who urged the Council to step up its efforts and take the lead in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reaffirmed solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to realize self-determination through the two-State solution.  He described aid given by his Government to Palestinian institution-building in that context, as well as humanitarian aid through UNRWA and other means.  Dialogue, diplomacy and statesmanship were the only way forward, he added, urging both sides to resume the peace process soon.  He also called for all parties in the region to curb what he called the dangerous rise of extremist violence, as well as for the implementation of relevant Council resolutions and prosecution of terrorists.  Recalling that India had been proactive in evacuating nationals of many countries from Yemen, including from four of the five permanent Council members, he urged all parties there to return to negotiations.  Noting Indian humanitarian assistance to Syrians as well, he reiterated support for a Syrian-led, inclusive political solution to the ongoing crisis.

BERNARDITO AUZA, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, expressed concern at the “total lack of progress” in negotiations between Palestine and Israel.  While Israel had legitimate concerns for its security, he said that such security could only come by being a part of its neighbours through a negotiated peace with the Palestinians and the implementation of the two-State solution.  He called for serious and concrete negotiations to reinvigorate the peace process.  He encouraged Lebanon’s leaders to resolve the impasse that had prevented the election of a president since May 2014, noting that the international community must support Lebanon to reacquire institutional normalcy and stability and to help it care for the huge number of refugees in its territory.  Regarding Syria, he called on the international community to prevent the humanitarian disaster that a siege and battle over Aleppo would provoke to prevent “yet another” gross violation of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights.  He condemned all attacks and abuses based on ethnic, religious, racial or other grounds.  In that regard, he noted that last month, before the Human Rights Council, 65 countries had signed a statement supporting the human rights of Christians and other communities, particularly in the Middle East, to call attention to the fact that the situation in that region threatened the very existence of many religious communities, especially Christians.

ANDRIY TSYMBALIUK (Ukraine) said that his country had a balanced, impartial position on the Middle East issue, and was willing to develop stable and constructive relations with both Israel and Arab States.  Its policy was based on official recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to create an independent Palestinian State.  At the same time, the proclamation of the Palestinian State should be an outcome of the Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement.  He, therefore, supported United States-led peace efforts, as well as relevant United Nations initiatives, and called on political leaders from all sides to work together to de-escalate the situation.  The conflict could only be solved on the basis of a two-State solution.  On Syria, he reaffirmed his country’s commitment to the universal principles and basic norms of international law, and strongly condemned the ongoing violence and systematic human rights violations in that country, which were perpetrated by the regime and terrorist groups.  Ukraine also remained deeply concerned about the activities of ISIL and other associated terrorist entities in the Middle East.  The negative impact of their presence, their violent extremist ideology and destabilizing actions, must not be tolerated and should be duly addressed by the international community.

KAIRAT ABDRAKHMANOV (Kazakhstan), recognizing the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and expressing support for the creation of an independent State of Palestine co-existing peacefully with Israel, agreed with other speakers that the two-State solution was the only viable option for a durable peace.  “We call, therefore, on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show wisdom, responsibility and political will to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of their peoples,” he said.  His country believed that the determined and concerted efforts of all Member States and other relevant stakeholders, together with the United Nations taking the leading role, was the only way to combat violent extremism.  He expressed concern about the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and called on the international community to pay utmost attention to it, further expressing grave concern about the developments affecting Palestinian refugees there.

JAMAL FARES ALROWAIEI (Bahrain) said that the Palestinian people had the right to establish an independent State on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.  Israel needed to respect resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly, and should withdraw completely from the Occupied Palestinian territories.  His country affirmed that the official membership of Palestine in the International Criminal Court was an important step in restoring Palestinian rights.  Moreover, the path to solving the problems of the Middle East required the end of the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, including Lebanese territories.  He reiterated that all Council and General Assembly resolutions must be adhered to, as should the outcome of the fourth Geneva conference of 1949, which banned the introduction of territorial changes to occupied countries.

MOTOHIDE YOSHIKAWA (Japan) said that an environment conducive to the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks must be fostered, as the status quo was not sustainable.  In that light, he called on the new Israeli administration to stand by its commitment to a two-State solution, both in word and deed, and on both parties to refrain from unilateral measures that could undermine peace efforts.  To that end, he recalled, the Japanese Prime Minister had visited the region in January to directly urge leaders of both sides to resume negotiations.  He encouraged countries that had influence in the region to do likewise.  He noted Japan’s assistance to Palestinians and the peace process had come to over $1.6 billion since 1993.  He also noted Japanese assistance to Syrians and its neighbours, and called on all parties in that conflict to end hostilities and allow full humanitarian access.  He called for long-term efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism and finally pledged the country’s cooperation with the United Nations in bringing peace to Yemen and other countries in the region.

MUHAMMAD ANSHOR (Indonesia), aligning with statements made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and OIC, condemned a recent bombing in Yemen that damaged the Indonesian embassy and injured three of the country’s citizens.  The attack showed clearly that the use of violence would only result in civilian casualties.  He appealed for a political solution to that situation.  In regards to the Palestinian question, he criticized recent Israeli actions and called on the Council and the whole United Nations system to restart the peace process to ensure that the children of Palestine and Israel enjoyed the peace and stability denied their ancestors.  He called on the Council to also act with urgency to address the tragedy in Yarmouk, Syria, and work expeditiously towards a political solution to the Syrian conflict.

PAIK JI-AH (Republic of Korea) said that, in order to preserve the two-State solution, all actors must adhere to previous commitments and step up their efforts to restart peace negotiations.  Her country remained concerned over expanded settlement activity and the detrimental effect it had on the viability of the two-State solution.  “Settlements are not only illegal, but are also not in Israel’s long-term strategic interests and run contrary to international peace efforts,” she said in that respect.  In Syria, the unmitigated culture of impunity and the systematic violations of human rights and humanitarian laws were particularly disturbing.  In that regard, he welcomed the adoption of resolution 2199 (2015) to cut off the major means of funding used by terrorists.  “However, the international community must do more to address this drawn-out conflict,” she said, noting that in addition to the $14 million in humanitarian aid given to Syria over the last three years, her country had pledged a $10 million at the March conference in Kuwait.  Her delegation was deeply concerned about the continuously deteriorating situation in Yemen, and had recently pledged $500,000 in aid through United Nations agencies.  Welcoming the Council’s adoption of resolution 2216 (2015), she urged all relevant parties to pay particular attention to the protection of civilians and the facilitation of the evacuation of foreign residents from Yemen.

FREDERICK M. SHAVA (Zimbabwe), associating with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, reaffirmed his country’s longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to realize their right to self-determination in an independent State living side by side with Israel.  He called on Israel to reaffirm its commitment to such a solution following its Prime Minister’s statements that seemed to throw doubt on its viability.  He also called for an end to settlement activities and other policies that undermined possibilities for peace, and holding Israel accountable for crimes.  The Council must act in accordance with its responsibilities and end Israeli occupation and impunity, which had caused untold Palestinian suffering.  In that context, he supported a resolution that set parameters for a final status agreement.

AHMED SAREER (Maldives) expressed his support for the people and the cause of Palestine, as well as his support for an end to violence in the region.  “It is with great sadness that we bear witness to continuing atrocities by those who choose to promote violence, hatred and fear,” he said.  Progress had once again given way to conflict, making lasting peace seem impossible.  His country reiterated its call for the full realization of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish their own State, alongside Israel, on the basis of 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.  Children were growing up under occupation “with hatred in their hearts and revenge on their minds”, and that hatred was manifested among the young people from every nation, race and creed.  That hatred, along with misguided views and information, fuelled recruits to terrorist organizations, including the so-called Islamic State.  The atrocities committed by that group in the name if Islam were inhumane and un-Islamic.  The protection of civilians in Syria, especially those trapped in vulnerable situations such as the refugees of Yarmouk, must take priority.

NILUKA KADURUGAMUWA (Sri Lanka), associating with the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that to end the long-term suffering of Palestinian people, peace negotiations with the Israelis must be resumed as soon as possible with the goal of reaching a just, durable solution based on Assembly and Council resolutions.  The parties should take advantage of the continuing international consensus on supporting such a solution, which must be mutual and address both sides’ concerns.  She called for accelerated reconstruction of Gaza and an end to Israeli settlement activity, and supported Palestine’s application for admission to full membership in the United Nations, recognizing that the viability of the two-State solution would depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people.

The representative of Israel, taking the floor a second time to respond to comments by other delegations, said that several members of the Non-Aligned Movement exhibited audacity in criticizing Israel when a good many of their members were involved in human rights atrocities.  In addition, he maintained that blaming Israel for evacuation of the United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF) was ridiculous since his country had merely provided asylum on its side of the line when the mission was under attack in its area of deployment.  Noting that over 220,000 had been reported killed in Syria, he again described Iran’s involvement in the regional conflicts mentioned and stressed that it was time to address that threat.

The representative of Saudi Arabia, also taking the floor a second time, said that Israel continued to falsify the truth by attacking anyone who criticized its policies, adding that the Syrian representative also repeated false claims to divert the attention of the Council from the crimes committed by its regime.  His country continued to combat terrorism in all its manifestations.  The Syrian representative’s mention of amputation of arms and hands in connection with his country were a reflection of the horrific practices of that regime.

Also taking the floor for a second time, the representative of Iran replied to several “senseless” statements by the Israeli delegate.  In particular, recent statements about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the two-State solution had laid bare Israel’s nefarious intentions, he said.  It was ironic and appalling that a regime famous for its apartheid practices could allow itself to accuse other countries in such a sinister manner and it was preposterous that a regime with a history of stockpiling weapons of the worst kind could condemn other countries, whose nuclear programmes were completely peaceful.  Those statements were attempts to divert international attention against Israel’s “pyromaniac intentions” and the crimes against its neighbours.