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Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the fourteenth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).¹ The reporting period is from 21 March to 4 June 2020.

II. Settlement activities

2. In resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council reaffirmed that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. In the same resolution, the Council reiterated its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in that regard. No such steps were taken during the reporting period.

3. On 26 May, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee approved a master plan for the expansion of the Har Homa settlement in occupied East Jerusalem by up to 2,200 housing units. If implemented, this expansion and the planned construction of 3,000 housing units in the Givat Hamatos settlement – tenders for 1,000 of which were announced in February – would further consolidate the ring of settlements along the southern perimeter of Jerusalem, separating the Palestinian areas of the city from Bethlehem and the southern West Bank. No other plans were advanced and no tenders were announced in Area C during the reporting period.

4. Earlier in May, the Israeli authorities approved the seizure of municipal planning authority at the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs from the Palestinian Municipality in Hebron. The Israeli authorities justified the decision as necessary in order to make the site accessible to those with disabilities, while stating that the project “will not change prayer arrangements or the status quo.” The expropriation order was issued on 12 May, allowing 60 days for objections. The Palestinian

¹ The thirteenth quarterly report of the Secretary-General was delivered on 30 March 2020 and circulated to Council Members in document [S/2020/263](#).



leadership, the Hebron Municipality, the Waqf and the Islamic authorities, among others, have condemned this move, arguing that it violates the 1997 Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron.

5. During the reporting period, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak and some indications from the Israeli authorities of a temporary freeze on the demolition of inhabited buildings due to the pandemic. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized 132 structures, resulting in the displacement of 86 Palestinians, including 47 children and 42 women, with 700 others also adversely affected. A total of 16 of the structures were demolished or seized on the basis of military order No. 1797, which authorizes an expedited process for structures deemed to be new and gives owners only 96 hours to demonstrate that they possess a valid building permit. A total of 27 structures demolished or seized were donor-funded, and 7 of the demolished structures were water-related (cisterns, water tanks, wells). Another 10 structures, primarily in occupied East Jerusalem, were demolished by their respective owners following receipt of demolition orders.

6. On 22 April, Israeli security forces demolished six structures, three of them inhabited, in illegal outposts near the Yitzhar settlement, which were reportedly linked to frequent incidents of settler violence in the area and clashes between settler extremists and Israeli security forces, including the throwing of three Molotov cocktails at a military vehicle on 26 March.

7. On 11 May, in Kubar village, close to Ramallah, Israeli forces demolished the home of a Palestinian family as a punitive measure. The house belonged to the family of a Palestinian man charged with participating in the killing of an Israeli girl in August 2019.

8. A total of 42 structures were demolished during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (24 April to 24 May). This is a significant increase as compared with previous years (13 in 2019; 1 in 2018; 0 in 2017).

III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

9. In resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction, and called for accountability in that regard and for compliance with obligations under international law for the strengthening of ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, including through existing security coordination, and to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism.

10. The reporting period, however, was characterized by acts of violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, settler-related violence, stabbing and ramming attacks, the firing of rockets by Palestinian militants from Gaza towards Israel, retaliatory Israeli airstrikes against militant targets in Gaza and the use of lethal force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians.

11. Overall, seven Palestinians, including one child, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and 217 Palestinians were injured, including 37 by live ammunition. One Israeli soldier was killed and three members of the Israeli security forces and two Israeli civilians, including one child, were injured in stabbings, clashes and other incidents.

12. In Gaza, while a relative calm mostly prevailed, on 27 March and 6 May, Palestinian militants launched one and two rockets, respectively, which landed in open areas of Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces fired nine tank shells, reportedly targeting an alleged military observation post in Gaza. Israeli drones furthermore fired three missiles reportedly targeting Hamas military sites in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

13. On 15 May, Palestinian militants in Gaza resumed the launching of incendiary devices into Israel. No injuries or damage were caused during the reporting period.

14. On at least 164 occasions, Israeli forces opened fire toward Gaza in the areas adjacent to the perimeter fence, no injuries were reported. On 76 occasions Israeli forces opened fire at Palestinians fishing off the coast of Gaza, injuring nine.

15. In early April, Hamas detained eight civil society activists, including one woman, who had participated in a video conference with Israeli and international peace activists, on the grounds of “establishing a normalization activity with the Israeli occupation.” Five have been released. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has raised serious concerns over the legality of the detentions, fair trial standards and the risk of ill-treatment in and outside detention.

16. Meanwhile, in the occupied West Bank, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 32-year-old Palestinian man and injured a relative of his in Ni’lin village on 22 March. The Israeli security forces reported that the two were throwing stones at vehicles, an account disputed by family members of the victim. Israeli authorities are withholding the body of the deceased man from the family.

17. On 1 April, a Palestinian man died from injuries sustained in an incident on 11 March in Jabal al-Urmah, Bayta village, in Nablus Governorate. During the incident, Israeli security forces had used live ammunition and rubber-coated bullets to disperse Palestinian residents demonstrating against Israeli settlers’ attempts to enter a historical religious site near the village.

18. On 22 April, a Palestinian man reportedly carried out a car ramming and stabbing attack against an Israeli border police officer at a checkpoint in occupied East Jerusalem and was subsequently shot and killed by security forces.

19. On 28 April, a 19-year-old Palestinian man stabbed a 62-year-old Israeli woman in the Israeli city of Kfar Saba, causing her moderate wounds. An Israeli civilian shot and seriously injured the Palestinian. The latter was subsequently arrested.

20. On 12 May, Israeli security forces shot, injured and arrested a Palestinian man at the Qalandiya checkpoint in the occupied West Bank, allegedly for attempting to stab a member of the Israeli security forces in the area.

21. On 12 May, an Israeli soldier was killed by a stone thrown at his head during an Israeli security forces arrest operation in the village of Ya’bad, near Janin. Israeli security forces have been conducting nightly arrest operations in the village in pursuit of those responsible. At least 53 Palestinians, including 5 women and 5 children, have been arrested, 20 of whom remain in detention. One of the detainees, a 19-year old Palestinian man, was found unconscious in an isolated area after he was arrested by Israeli security forces. The village was placed under military closure for approximately one week. A suspect was subsequently apprehended.

22. On 13 May, Israeli security forces shot a 17-year-old Palestinian boy in the head with live ammunition, killing him, during a search operation and subsequent clashes in the Fawwar refugee camp near Hebron. Witnesses identified him as a bystander. Four other Palestinians, including a child, were also injured by live fire.

23. On 14 May, a 19-year old Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israel security forces during an alleged ramming attack against Israeli soldiers at Bayt Awwa checkpoint, west of Hebron. The circumstances of the incident remain unclear. An Israeli soldier also sustained serious injuries in the incident.
24. On 15 May, Palestinians threw a pipe bomb and Molotov cocktails at an Israeli security forces observation post in Abu Dis town near East Jerusalem. Israeli security forces responded with gunfire, injuring three Palestinians.
25. On 29 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man for allegedly carrying out a car ramming attack in Nabi Salih village near Ramallah. In ensuing clashes with residents, Israeli security forces shot and injured with live ammunition a 22-year old Palestinian man with Downs Syndrome.
26. On 30 May, Israeli security forces shot and killed an unarmed, autistic, 31-year-old Palestinian man in the Old City of Jerusalem. Israeli police are investigating the incident. The Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, referred to the incident as “a tragedy” and the Alternate Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Benjamin Gantz, apologized publicly.
27. Tensions in the Isawiyah neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem continued as a result of Israeli security forces operations, including house raids and arrests, and recurring clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. Overall, Israeli forces conducted at least 60 search and arrest operations, arresting some 100 people, including at least 16 children, and injuring one.
28. Settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank increased during the reporting period, despite strict movement restrictions imposed by the Palestinian and Israeli authorities in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 80 attacks by Israeli settlers and others against Palestinians, resulting in 38 injuries and damage to Palestinian-owned properties.
29. A large number of incidents were also recorded in relation to the wheat harvesting season, including physical assault and harassment of Palestinian farmers by Israeli settlers, as well as damage to over 2,000 olive trees, saplings and dozens of dunums of agricultural land. These confrontations were often violent, spiralling into clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. Most affected were the communities of Khidr (Bethlehem), Turmus'ayya, Mughayyir, Ras Karkar (Ramallah), As Sawiya (Nablus), Fuqayqis, the H2 zone of Hebron and Tuwani (south Hebron hills).
30. On 6 April, a group of settlers attacked Palestinian farmers with dogs, electric batons and pepper spray in Shuyukh village, east of Hebron. The settlers were reportedly trying to install a fence on Palestinian-owned land. A 53-year old farmer was injured in the attack.
31. On 7 April, 10 settlers from the Halamish settlement assaulted a Palestinian farmer while, with his sons, aged 28 and 32, he was ploughing his land near Kobar village. The three were beaten with rifles and the sons taken to the settlement. The brothers were later released.
32. On 6 May, 11 settlers attacked a 52-year old Palestinian man and his nephew who were herding sheep near Burqah village, south of Janin. Twenty of his sheep were still missing at the end of the reporting period.
33. On 18 May, Israel's District Court in Lod convicted an Israeli settler of the murder in 2015 of three members of the Palestinian Dawabsheh family, including a toddler, when their home in the occupied West Bank village of Duma was burned down while they were asleep. In its verdict, the Court concurred with the State

prosecution that the murder was an act of terror; however the settler was acquitted of the charge of membership in a terror organization. The defendant reportedly intends to appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

IV. Incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric

34. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon both parties to act on the basis of international law, including international humanitarian law, and their previous agreements and obligations, to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, with the aim, inter alia, of de-escalating the situation on the ground, rebuilding trust and confidence, demonstrating through policies and actions a genuine commitment to the two-State solution and creating the conditions necessary for promoting peace. Provocation, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric continued during the reporting period.

35. On its social media pages, Fatah continued to glorify perpetrators of previous terrorist attacks against Israelis. On multiple occasions, senior Palestinian officials accused Israeli authorities of seeking to intentionally spread COVID-19 among Palestinians. Members of militant factions continued to praise acts of violence against Israelis, including the ramming and stabbing attack on 22 April at a checkpoint in occupied East Jerusalem.

36. At the same time, Senior Israeli government officials continued to make inflammatory statements in support of the illegal annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank, with some calling it a “historic opportunity.” One Israeli minister stated that “under no circumstances will we allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state.” Also in the context of annexation discussions, some Israeli political leaders made demeaning comments with regard to Palestinians, outlining their goal as gaining “maximum territory with minimum Arabs”.

37. On 3 April, Israeli police detained the Palestinian Authority Minister of Jerusalem Affairs for several hours and interrogated him over allegations of violating an Israeli law prohibiting Palestinian Authority activities in Jerusalem without coordination. The Minister was released on the condition that he abstain from such activities and was banned from movement within East Jerusalem for 14 days. On 5 April, the Authority’s Governor of Jerusalem was arrested over similar allegations and released the following day. On 14 April, Israeli security forces raided and shut down a COVID-19 testing centre opened by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Silwan and arrested a volunteer. On 5 May Israeli security forces arrested 15 Palestinians, including the Palestinian Authority Secretary-General of the National People’s Congress of Jerusalem, and the Mayor of Kafr Aqab, in occupied East Jerusalem and the Old City.

V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

38. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that were imperilling the two-State solution. Negative trends on the ground continued during the reporting period.

39. On 17 May, a new emergency coalition Government was sworn into office in Israel, following a year of political uncertainty that ended with the 20 April signing of a coalition agreement. The agreement stipulates that, as of 1 July, and following consultation with the Alternate Prime Minister, the Prime Minister of Israel can

present “the agreement to be reached with the United States on the application of sovereignty” over parts of the occupied West Bank for approval in the Government or Knesset. The agreement also calls for the promotion of peace agreements with the country’s neighbours and regional cooperation.

40. On 19 May, in response to the stated plans of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Authority announced that it was absolved “of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones”, further calling on Israel to assume its obligations as the occupying Power. The statement by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, also reaffirms the Palestinian “commitment to a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-State solution ... on the condition that negotiations will be held to achieve that under international auspices (the Quartet plus) and through an international peace conference based on international legitimacy.” It reaffirms the Palestinian leadership’s willingness to “achieve a just and comprehensive peace,” based on the Arab Peace Initiative and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#).

41. On 20 May, the Palestinian Prime Minister instructed Cabinet members to immediately commence implementation of the Palestinian leadership’s announcement, while assuring the international community that the Palestinian Authority would not allow security to deteriorate. On the same day, Palestinian officials formally notified Israeli counterparts of the termination of security coordination. On 3 June, the Authority announced that it would refuse to receive the clearance funds that Israel collects on its behalf under the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The practical implications of these steps are still unfolding.

42. Palestinians continue to face the immense socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have lost their jobs, small and medium enterprises are unable to operate and non-conflict-related violence against women and children has increased. The World Bank estimates that the Palestinian economy will likely decline by 7.6 per cent to 11 per cent in 2020. As a result of sharp declines in Palestinian Authority revenues, the Authority’s fiscal deficit could reach \$1 billion–\$1.5 billion in 2020. Without recourse to international borrowing or additional budget support from donors, the Palestinian Government will be forced to adopt severe austerity measures. As a stop-gap measure, on 11 May, Israel and the Authority concluded a \$233 million loan agreement, secured against future Palestinian clearance revenues collected by Israel. This arrangement is intended to ensure that the Authority can maintain a minimum level of cash flow for the coming four months. The Authority has decided not to avail itself of this facility, further to its decision of 19 May.

43. On 9 May, an Israeli military order, amended in February 2020, came into effect, which could hold Palestinian commercial banks liable for processing the Palestinian Authority’s payments to Palestinian security prisoners, their families or families of those killed while involved in attacks against Israelis. According to media reports, the implementation of the amendment was frozen on 4 June pending further review.

44. On 24 April, the Jerusalem District Court issued a decision ordering the temporary withholding of some \$128 million from the Palestinian Authority as compensation to families of victims of attacks against Israelis during the second intifada. The Court ruled that the sum, at least in part, would be collected from the Authority’s clearance revenues withheld by Israel since March 2019.

45. Humanitarian interventions continue in close coordination with all relevant authorities to help address the ramifications of the COVID-19 outbreak across the

Occupied Palestinian Territory. The revised COVID-19 inter-agency response plan, put forward by the United Nations and partners, which requested \$42.4 million to contain the pandemic and mitigate its impact up to the end of June 2020, is 58 per cent funded, with an additional \$17.3 million in funding outside the appeal. Including resources outside the response plan, \$39.5 million have been mobilized to support COVID-19-related response activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

46. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the already dire humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza. According to recent surveys, approximately 35 per cent of industrial firms in Gaza have ceased operation completely owing to COVID-19, while the rest have reduced their operating capacity. As a result, approximately 13,000 industrial workers have lost their jobs. Virtually all restaurants and hotels have ceased operations, leading to the release of over 10,000 workers. Recent job losses come on top of an already high unemployment rate in Gaza of 45 per cent at the end of 2019.

47. Reconstruction and repair of damages incurred during the 2014 conflict in Gaza slowed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of funding. The reconstruction of 65 destroyed houses and the repair of 13 partially damaged homes were completed. The reconstruction of an additional 410 destroyed houses is in progress. There remains a funding gap of \$34 million to complete the reconstruction of 849 destroyed homes and \$75 million for the repair of 56,037 partially damaged homes.

48. In March, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) launched comprehensive measures to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 across the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Agency closed all its schools in the Territory simultaneously with Palestinian Authority schools, while its medical clinics successfully introduced strict protocols to reduce non-urgent and chronic patient volume, including through telemedicine. In Gaza, among other measures, the Agency closed food distribution centres serving over 1 million beneficiaries per quarter, as these represented an enormous transmission risk, and resorted to a challenging logistical effort to conduct home deliveries of food parcels. The Agency also began meeting humanitarian needs arising from the situation, including cash assistance for Palestinians, in particular the elderly, unable to access necessary medical services for financial reasons. Coordinating with Palestinian authorities and with support from other partners, UNRWA supported preventive efforts to avoid a major COVID-19 outbreak.

49. UNRWA continued to face enormous financial challenges with more than half the Agency's core operating budget unfunded at the end of the reporting period. In consultation with UNRWA, Jordan and Sweden announced that they would co-chair a ministerial-level pledging conference on 23 June to raise funds for the Agency's 2020 needs, secure commitments for a further two years and identify additional, innovative sources of financing.

50. On 2 June, Norway and the European Union co-chaired a virtual Ministerial meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The Palestinian Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, and foreign ministers of key donors and regional countries took part in the meeting alongside representatives of the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Donors underscored their commitment to the Palestinian Government and people, as well as the United Nations, in particular UNRWA, and their continued support for a negotiated two-State solution and Palestinian economic development. They noted the parties' cooperation on the COVID-19 response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and called for their economic relationship to be updated and modernized, highlighting the large financing gap likely to face the Palestinian Government owing to the crisis. Donors expressed concern over the

negative implications of unilateral actions on the ground, in particular the stated intention of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. As noted in the Committee's Chair's summary, "any such move, if implemented, would run counter to the efforts to realize a viable two-State solution and be detrimental to peace and security, and would constitute a violation of international law."

VI. Efforts by the parties and the international community to advance the peace process and other relevant developments

51. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. No such steps were taken during the reporting period.

52. In the same resolution, the Security Council called upon all parties to continue, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process and urged in that regard the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. The Security Council underlines that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

53. On 22 May, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet from the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union and the United Nations held a conference call to discuss the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian peace and the latest developments on the ground. The United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to achieving a negotiated two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements, and reiterated its call to all stakeholders to refrain from any unilateral action that harms the prospects of meaningful negotiations and peace. Discussions are ongoing, notwithstanding substantial differences among Quartet members on the way forward.

VII. Observations

54. I am gravely concerned by the stated intention of the Government of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. If implemented, this would constitute a most serious violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. It would be devastating to the two-State solution and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and our broader efforts to maintain international peace and security. Concern and opposition to annexation is widespread and shared throughout the region and the international community. Many countries, regional intergovernmental organizations, prominent civil society groups and eminent Israelis and Palestinians are warning about the legal, political and security consequences of such unilateral action. I call upon Israel to abandon its annexation plans.

55. For over 25 years, Palestinians have believed that the peaceful pursuit of their right to self-determination, through meaningful negotiations, would result in an independent, contiguous and sovereign state of their own – Palestine, living side-by-side with Israel, in peace, with secure and recognized borders, and with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. I have always shared this belief. However, unilateral Israeli

annexation of any part of the occupied West Bank would effectively close the door for a renewal of negotiations and destroy the prospect of a viable Palestinian State and the two-State solution. This would be calamitous for Palestinians, Israelis and the region. I cannot overemphasize the urgency of reversing this dangerous trajectory.

56. I remain deeply troubled by the continued settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The approval of expansion plans for the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem is very alarming because it is yet another clear signal that the Government of Israel intends to solidify the continuum of illegal settlements in the area and disconnect East Jerusalem from the other Palestinian communities of the occupied West Bank, such as Bethlehem, to its south.

57. I reiterate that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation under international law. The establishment and expansion of settlements fuel resentment, hopelessness and disillusionment among Palestinians, are key drivers of human rights violations and significantly heighten Israeli-Palestinian tensions. They entrench the military occupation of Israel and undermine the prospect of achieving a viable two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent and sovereign Palestinian State. I urge the Government of Israel to stop the advancement of all settlement plans immediately.

58. The dispute over planned construction work by the Israeli authorities in the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs risks fuelling tensions in a highly sensitive part of the occupied West Bank. Any changes to the delicate balance at holy sites not agreed to by all stakeholders threaten stability and must not be taken unilaterally. I urge both parties to resolve this issue through dialogue and in a coordinated and respectful manner.

59. I am deeply concerned at the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which continue even amid the COVID-19 outbreak. In this context, the significant increase in the total number of demolitions during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, relative to previous years, is particularly worrisome. I urge Israel to cease demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property and to allow Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to develop their communities, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

60. I remain gravely concerned about the continuing violence, terrorist attacks against civilians, and incitement to violence that exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and drive us further away from a peaceful resolution of the conflict. I am appalled that yet another Palestinian child was killed, shot in the head with live ammunition by the Israeli security forces, in Fawwar refugee camp. Children should never be the target of violence. The killing by the Israeli security forces of an unarmed, autistic Palestinian man in the Old City of Jerusalem is equally appalling. I reiterate that Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. All incidents must be swiftly, thoroughly and independently investigated.

61. I am deeply concerned at the continued settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in particular given the recorded increase during the reporting period. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population and to investigate and hold the perpetrators of the attacks accountable.

62. I would like to reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israel Defense Forces soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important

humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to provide full information on them, as required by international humanitarian law.

63. I also remain deeply concerned at the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians and call on Israel to return withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

64. The United Nations response to COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been swift and effective and has directly supported the Palestinian Government's own efforts. The humanitarian country team's inter-agency response plan, the soon-to-be-released United Nations country team development system response plan, as well as the Palestinian Government's own response plans urgently need donor support. I commend Israeli-Palestinian cooperation to respond to and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Gaza and the West Bank. This was largely focused on facilitating the delivery of medical assistance, but also extended to other areas, including specific steps to arrest the economic impact of the crisis.

65. I welcome the \$233 million soft-loan agreement between the parties, as secured by future Palestinian clearance revenues, which Israel collects. This was intended to provide a critical fiscal lifeline for the Palestinian Authority, particularly with respect to addressing the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this lifeline has to be combined with a long-term response, a strategic shift by Israel in its economic relations with the Authority and a meaningful reform effort by the Palestinians. Working with its international partners, the Authority must also adopt emergency budget measures to address the pandemic, along the lines outlined by the World Bank.

66. The Palestinian leadership announced that it considers itself absolved of all agreements and understandings with Israel and the United States. I am concerned that the enforcement of the Palestinian leadership's announcement could alter local dynamics and trigger instability across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and beyond. Particularly worrying is the decision to stop accepting clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Given the economic uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the reduced donor support, this decision only contributes to the hardship of the Palestinian people. It is critical that humanitarian and other assistance not be delayed or stopped as a result of such policies. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been marked by periods of extreme violence, but never before has the risk of escalation been accompanied by a political horizon so distant, an economic situation so fragile and a region so volatile.

67. I remain seriously concerned about the fragile situation in Gaza and the immense suffering of its people. The risk of a major escalation remains. I take this opportunity to reiterate that no amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will address the challenges in Gaza. These ultimately require political solutions and the political will to pursue them. Taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Only by fully lifting the debilitating closures, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis. The indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Palestinian militants must cease this practice immediately.

68. Discussions on holding Palestinian general elections should continue. If held, these would be the first since 2006, renewing the legitimacy of national institutions. The international community should support this process, with a view to encouraging national unity rather than division.

69. It is critical that the important Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support of the efforts by Egypt in this regard, and I call upon all Palestinian factions to make serious efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the occupied West Bank under a single, democratic, national government. Gaza is and must remain an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

70. The financial situation of UNRWA remains a serious concern. The Agency is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, it is also critical for regional stability. Sufficient funding is essential for the Agency's continuity. I applaud the leadership that Jordan and Sweden have shown in mobilizing support for the Agency, including by co-chairing another pledging conference on 23 June. I urge Member States to continue their support for UNRWA and step forward with multi-year commitments at the upcoming conference.

71. I urge all stakeholders – Israelis, Palestinians, regional States and the broader international community – to take action now that enables the parties to step back from the brink and begin the process of re-engaging in a dialogue that will halt unilateral action, chart a positive way forward and avoid a descent into chaos. All sides must do their part in the coming weeks and months to preserve the prospect of a negotiated two-State solution. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements in pursuit of achieving the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State – living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

72. I express my deep appreciation to my Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, for his outstanding service in what remains a challenging context. I also pay tribute to all staff working under difficult circumstances in the service of the United Nations.
