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Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the twenty-eighth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), covering the period from 20 September to 7 December 2023.[1]

II. Settlement activities

2. In its 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. 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 its legal obligations in that regard. No such steps were taken during the reporting period, as settlement activities continued.

3. On 17 October, the Ministry of Construction and Housing republished two tenders for approximately 190 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem, following the cancellation of the previous tenders for the same housing units that were published in December 2022 and March 2023.

4. On 29 November, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a plan for the construction of over 1,470 housing units at the Lower Aqueduct site, adjacent to Kibbutz Ramat Rachel and the Palestinian neighbourhood of Umm Tuba. Approximately half of the projected units are intended for construction across the Green Line in occupied East Jerusalem.

5. During the reporting period, at least four illegal outposts were created in the occupied West Bank and at least one additional outpost, which had been evacuated, was again reconstructed.

6. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, throughout the reporting period. Israeli authorities, citing the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain

[1] The previous report was presented orally at a meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.9425).

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almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, demolished, seized or forced people to demolish 130 structures, a 45 per cent decrease compared with the previous reporting period. The demolition of those structures resulted in the displacement of 325 persons, including 168 children, and affected more than 5,800 other persons. Eleven structures were demolished in a single incident in Hizma town in Jerusalem on 3 November.

7. In total, 28 structures in East Jerusalem were demolished by their owners to avoid heavy Israeli demolition fees after they received demolition orders.

8. During the reporting period, there was an increase in the displacement of Palestinians, particularly since 7 October: at least 143 Palestinian households from 15 herding communities, comprising 1,014 people, including 388 children, were displaced. The households cited settler violence and access restrictions. This represents a 27 per cent increase compared with the monthly average over the first nine months of 2023.

III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

9. In its 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, called for accountability in that regard and called 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 was marked by unprecedented and ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups, alongside a surge in violence in the West Bank. It has been the deadliest period for Israelis and Palestinians in the history of this conflict. According to Palestinian sources, including the Gaza Ministry of Health, from 20 September to 7 December, throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel, at least 18,448 Palestinians have been killed, including 4,886 women and 7,180 children, and at least 50,167 Palestinians have been injured. During the same period, according to Israeli and United Nations sources, at least 1,349 Israelis and foreign nationals, including at least 33 children, 284 women and 412 members of security forces, were killed in Israel and the occupied West Bank, while another 6,241 were injured.

11. On the morning of 7 October, during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups launched a large-scale armed attack on Israel. The attacks, which included the commitment of numerous acts of terror, saw an estimated 3,000 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants from Gaza infiltrating some 20 communities and military facilities in southern Israel, in the Gaza periphery, by land, sea and air, while thousands of rockets were launched towards population centres in Israel, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

12. During the armed attack, which amounted to the single deadliest attack in the history of Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups killed over 1,250 Israelis and foreign nationals, including at least 281 women, 33 children and 321 Israeli security forces personnel, according to Israeli sources. Among those killed were 364 people attending a music festival near Kibbutz Re’im. Dozens more are missing, or their bodies remain unidentified, and 6,200 Israelis and foreigners were injured, according to official Israeli sources. Thirty-three attacks on Israeli medical facilities and personnel were recorded. Reports and accounts, including videos and other evidence, have emerged revealing horrific acts of extreme violence, including rape, torture, mutilation and bodies burned beyond recognition, with hundreds shot at

point-blank range in their homes and cars and parents and children killed before each others' eyes.

13. In addition, some 250 people, including both Israelis and foreign nationals and approximately 65 women and 34 children, were abducted and taken into Gaza. On 20 and 23 October, Hamas released four women hostages for what it said were humanitarian and health reasons. The Israel Defense Forces rescued 1 Israeli soldier on 29 October, reported that it had subsequently retrieved 3 bodies of hostages during its ground operations and confirmed the death of 22 hostages in captivity. Starting on 24 November, as part of an arrangement between Israel and Hamas facilitated by Egypt, Qatar and the United States of America, during a seven-day humanitarian pause, Hamas released 78 hostages – 42 women, 33 children and 3 men. In parallel, 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees were released from Israeli jails. In addition, 8 Israelis and 24 foreign hostages were released separately.

14. On the day of the attack, the Security Cabinet of Israel declared a state of war with the aim of, according to a post on social media, "the destruction of the military and governing capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad". That same day, Israeli forces began a massive bombardment of what they said were Hamas sites throughout Gaza.

15. Heavy fighting between Israeli security forces and Palestinian armed groups continued inside Israel until 10 October, when the Israeli military announced it had regained control of Israeli communities and the perimeter fence. Over 130,000 Israelis were displaced from the area.

16. Palestinian armed groups in Gaza have continued to launch indiscriminate rocket attacks towards Israeli civilian population centres, including from densely populated residential areas in Gaza, reaching north of Haifa in the north, Jerusalem in the east and Eilat in the south. Since 7 October, according to Israeli sources, over 11,500 rockets have been fired, with more than 1,500 falling short within Gaza, killing at least 19 Israelis and injuring hundreds more, and causing damage to 223 residential buildings and 47 other civilian and industrial structures, including the Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon. The Israel Defense Forces have reported 91 Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza.

17. Apart from a seven-day humanitarian pause from 24 to 30 November, the intense air, naval and subsequent ground operation by Israel in the Gaza Strip has continued up to the time of writing. According to the Israel Defense Forces, Israel has struck over 22,000 targets. This has resulted in massive destruction and fatalities. As at 7 December, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported an estimated 17,177 Palestinians killed, including 4,885 women and 7,112 children, as well as 81 journalists and 286 medical workers and first responders. Among those killed were 131 United Nations personnel, the highest number in any conflict to date since the United Nations was founded. More than 46,000 Palestinians are reported to have been injured. In addition, many more are missing, presumably many of them buried under the rubble, including women and children, as continuous airstrikes, a lack of equipment and other challenges hinder rescue efforts.

18. So far, 339 education facilities, 26 hospitals, 56 health-care facilities, 88 mosques and 3 churches, as well as 88 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) shelters, have reportedly been hit, leaving large areas of Gaza completely flattened, particularly in the north. In some cases, the Israeli military claimed that civilian sites were being used for military purposes.

19. On 31 October, the Israel Defense Forces destroyed an entire neighbourhood composed of 20 residential buildings in the Jabalia refugee camp, the most densely populated area in Gaza. In a statement, the Israel Defense Forces said that it had targeted and killed the commander of the Hamas Central Jabaliya Battalion

responsible for military operations in northern Gaza and that Hamas infrastructure under the buildings had collapsed after the strike. In subsequent days, Israeli ground forces advanced further into Gaza, primarily in northern and central Gaza, but also in Khan Yunis in the south. Battles between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups escalated in northern Gaza. By 10 November, Israeli forces had advanced into Gaza City, followed by ground battles in central Gaza and shelling from the sea. On 14 November, the Israeli Minister for Defense, Yoav Gallant, said that Israel was in effective control of the north of Gaza, above ground, and reiterated that the operation would continue for months and extend to the south.

20. Following the humanitarian pause, hostilities resumed between Israel and Hamas on 1 December, with Hamas launching rockets towards Israel and Israel restarting air and ground operations across Gaza. Israel Defense Forces ground operations in the north centred on Jabaliya and Shuja'iyah in Gaza City, and troops advanced on Khan Yunis in the south, Gaza's second-largest city, leading to a large number of further casualties, displacement and extensive damage. On 2 and 3 December, the Israel Defense Forces announced that it had targeted and killed two Hamas field commanders in Shuja'iyah and at the Al-Shati' refugee camp in northern Gaza. During the week following the pause, Hamas fired hundreds of rockets towards southern and central areas of Israel, including Tel Aviv and Ashkelon.

21. Repeated attacks on health-care facilities have been reported in Gaza since 7 October, resulting in the deaths of health-care workers, patients and internally displaced people sheltering in those locations. In a widely condemned and highly disputed incident, on 17 October, the grounds of the Ahli Arab Hospital in northern Gaza were struck, killing scores. Hamas blamed Israel for the strike, while Israeli authorities have pointed to rockets launched at the same time by militants from the Hospital's vicinity, which they assess as having struck the facility. On 4 November, an Israeli strike hit an ambulance convoy outside Shifa' Hospital, reportedly killing at least 15 people and injuring 60 in a subsequent strike. Israeli forces confirmed it had targeted an ambulance, alleging that it was being used by Hamas. Strikes in and around the hospitals in Gaza City and northern Gaza intensified from 9 November. Between 15 and 21 November, Shifa' Hospital and additional hospitals, including the Al-Awdah Hospital and the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza and the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, were struck and some hospitals had Israeli ground operations conducted in and around them. On numerous occasions, the Israel Defense Forces stated that the hospitals were being used by Hamas for military purposes.

22. Meanwhile, violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, increased during the reporting period, particularly since 7 October, resulting in an unprecedented number of Palestinian fatalities during a single reporting period, as Israeli authorities imposed widespread movement restrictions and conducted extensive operations and arrests. High numbers of daily clashes and armed exchanges between Palestinians, including armed groups, and Israeli security forces and settlers have been recorded, as well as attacks perpetrated by Palestinians against Israelis and high levels of violence and intimidation by settlers.

23. In total, in the occupied West Bank, 257 Palestinians, including 1 woman and 67 children, were killed by Israeli security forces during search-and-arrest operations, demonstrations, clashes, air strikes and other incidents. A total of 4,167 Palestinians were injured, including 61 women and 348 children. Of that number, 2,357 were injured owing to tear gas inhalation, while 1,111 were injured by live ammunition. In addition, 8 Palestinians, including 1 child, were killed, and 98 injured, including 11 women and 6 children, in attacks by Israeli settlers or other civilians.

24. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, 7 Israelis, including 3 security forces personnel and 3 women, were killed, and another 41

Israelis, including 2 women, 1 child and 29 security forces personnel, were injured by Palestinians in attacks, armed exchanges and clashes, and in rock- and Molotov-cocktail-throwing and other incidents. One Israeli was killed by friendly fire in the context of a Palestinian attack.

25. The period was marked by a significant rise in the number and intensity of Israeli operations throughout the occupied West Bank that included heavy exchanges of fire between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. In many cases, these exchanges escalated to include the use of improvised explosive devices by armed Palestinians, as well as the deployment of Israeli airstrikes on six occasions. Over 70 per cent of Palestinian fatalities occurred in the context of these operations. Since 7 October, Israeli security forces have conducted over 1,700 operations, resulting in the arrest of more than 3,500 Palestinians, including at least 145 children.

26. On 19 and 20 October, a massive Israeli security forces operation in the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm saw intensive exchanges of fire between armed Palestinians and Israeli security forces. One member of the Israeli security forces was killed, and 10 others injured by an improvised explosive device; Israeli security forces responded with drone strikes. Fifteen Palestinians, some armed, including 6 children, were killed during the operation and in armed exchanges – the highest toll in a single West Bank operation since the second intifada. On 9 November, in the Jenin refugee camp, Israeli security forces deployed snipers, military jeeps and bulldozers. Amid clashes with Palestinians, Israeli security forces conducted at least four airstrikes in various parts of the camp; 14 Palestinians, including several children, were killed, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed 5 of those killed as members. Again, in the Nur Shams refugee camp, on 13 and 14 November, seven Palestinians were killed, including four by live ammunition and three by an Israeli airstrike; according to initial reports the four men shot were bystanders. On 25 November, another five Palestinians were killed, including three children, during a 10-hour Israeli security forces operation in the Jenin refugee camp involving armed clashes and airstrikes. On 3 December, a Palestinian, reportedly a bystander, was shot in the back and killed by Israeli security forces during an operation, followed by an exchange of fire in Qalqilyah City.

27. On 6 November, in an undercover operation in Tulkarm, Israeli security forces killed four Palestinians who they said were members of a Hamas cell. On 18 November, five Palestinians, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed in an Israeli operation that included armed clashes and an airstrike on the Fatah headquarters in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. On its social media, Fatah's military wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, mourned all five. Israeli authorities stated that the Israel Defense Forces aircraft "struck a hideout used by terrorists involved in planning imminent terror attacks against Israeli civilians and military targets".

28. Widespread demonstrations took place across the occupied West Bank, particularly after 7 October, in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. Forty-eight Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in clashes that developed in the context of these demonstrations, including, on 9 October, a 20-year-old shot during confrontations at the entrance of the Arroub refugee camp, north of Hebron; and on 13 October, a 14-year-old boy was killed after a march in Bayt Furik, east of Nablus. On 17 and 18 October, Palestinian security forces killed two Palestinians during protests against the bombing of the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza in Ramallah and Tubas, respectively. A 9-year-old girl was killed in Janin on 17 October, during demonstrations that included exchanges of fire between armed Palestinians and Palestinian security forces as they dispersed protesters.

29. Palestinians killed 6 Israelis, including 2 security personnel, in attacks or alleged attacks that resulted in 18 Palestinian fatalities. On 2 November, in an attack claimed by Hamas, an off-duty Israeli army reservist was killed in a drive-by shooting in the

northern West Bank. In two separate incidents, Hamas claimed responsibility for fatal shooting attacks against Israelis. On 16 November, three Palestinian gunmen opened fire at a checkpoint near Bethlehem, killing one member of the Israeli security forces and injuring at least three others; the three assailants were killed by Israeli security forces. On 30 November, two Palestinians shot and killed three Israelis, including two women, at a bus stop; the assailants were killed by an armed Israeli civilian who was subsequently misidentified and killed by a member of the Israel Defense Forces.

30. Settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, intensified significantly during the reporting period, in the context of the annual olive harvest and the 7 October attacks by Hamas in southern Israel, with a daily average of five incidents per day, peaking at more than double that rate during the week following 7 October. Since the start of the harvest season, at the beginning of October, one Palestinian harvester has been injured and more than 1,600 olive trees have been damaged or had their harvest stolen.

31. Eight Palestinians have been killed in settler attacks. On 11 October, masked Israeli settlers, some of them armed, attacked the town of Qusrah, south of Nablus. During the ensuing confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli settlers accompanied by Israeli security forces, three Palestinians, including a 17-year-old, were shot and killed by settlers, and one by Israeli security forces. The following day, settlers shot at mourners in the funeral procession, killing two more Palestinians. On 24 October, near Ras Karkar in Ramallah Governorate, a settler shot at Palestinians driving in a vehicle, resulting in one fatality and two injuries. On 28 October, four settlers, one armed, threw stones and shot at a 20-member Palestinian family harvesting olives in Sawiyah, south of Nablus, killing one Palestinian man. Over the course of the reporting period, the Israeli Minister for Defense approved the administrative detention of four settlers in conjunction with attacks against Palestinians during the reporting period.

32. Incidents of attacks and provocation of Palestinian communities by Israeli settlers increased in several areas in the West Bank, resulting in significant numbers of Palestinians leaving their homes and relocating elsewhere. On 12 October, 51 people were displaced from the Shihda wa Hamlan herding community in Nablus after armed settlers reportedly threatened them at gunpoint, warning that they would be killed. On 23 October, 65 members of a herding community south-east of Bethlehem relocated to the nearby village of Tuqu‘ due to repeated attacks by settlers. The entire communities of Al-Ganoub and Khirbat Zanutah, in the environs of Hebron, relocated due to what they said was settler violence, intimidation and threats, and one family near Yatta was ordered by armed settlers to raise Israeli flags on their houses.

33. Following the 7 October attacks, the Israeli Ministry of National Security, the Israeli police and the Israel Defense Forces launched a campaign to establish, reinforce and arm hundreds of community-based quick-response teams in cities and towns across Israel, as well as in settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The teams are reportedly meant to work in conjunction with and under the supervision of the Israeli police or military and to provide an initial response to attacks and security threats. As a result of the campaign, thousands of guns and rifles have been distributed by Israeli security forces to volunteers in these locations.

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. Unfortunately, the horrific violence during the reporting period was exacerbated by numerous instances of incitement, inflammatory rhetoric and the glorification of the killing of civilians.

35. Official Hamas social media channels disseminated numerous posts and videos documenting, celebrating and glorifying the acts of terror carried out against Israeli communities on 7 October. Hamas officials also widely celebrated the attack, with one Hamas leader calling it “a dream come true” and others vowing that it would be repeated. Some Fatah officials and official social media pages also praised the attack, boasted of the participation of the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the attack or sought to portray it as a legitimate act. One senior Fatah official said that the events of 7 October were part of a “path of battles and heroic acts”. Some officials sought to downplay the scope of the brutality during the attack and one official denied that children had been targeted and killed in the attack.

36. An Israeli minister said during a radio interview that dropping an atomic bomb on Gaza should be considered by Israel during the current war and that there were no “uninvolved [civilians] in Gaza”. His remarks were subsequently condemned by the Minister for Defense and other coalition members, and the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said they were “disconnected from reality”. A member of the Knesset called in a social media post to: “Burn down Gaza now. No less.” Another called to “flatten and crush Gaza” with “no mercy” before the commencement of an Israeli ground operation, while a third stated that “the Palestinian Authority is as much of a Nazi [entity] as Hamas is”. An Israeli minister said, “We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.” Another Israeli minister wrote an English-language op-ed suggesting that “voluntary resettlement of Palestinians in Gaza, for humanitarian reasons, outside of the Strip” should be considered as an “option”.

V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

37. 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.

38. In Gaza, the humanitarian impact of the conflict has been catastrophic. The Israeli siege of Gaza imposed on 9 October included shutting off Israeli-supplied water (two connection points were subsequently reopened) and electricity, as well as restricting the entry of all imports, including food and fuel. The sole Gaza power plant has not operated since 11 October. Hospitals have suffered heavy damage. Of 36 hospitals in Gaza, 14 are still functioning, most providing only partial services. The acute shortage of fuel has had an impact on patient care, including for newborns. Since the resumption of hostilities on 1 December, an increase in infectious diseases has been observed, amid overcrowding in shelters, the destruction of water and sanitation systems and the decreased availability of health services.

39. Food, drinking water and cooking gas across Gaza are extremely limited, and markets are reportedly empty, except for those with food from humanitarian aid; plants are largely inoperable; and wastewater plants are shut down as a result of damage and destruction from bombardments and lack of fuel, risking widespread health threats. In northern Gaza, 97 per cent of households are not eating enough, and almost half the population is simply starving. The situation in the south is similarly dire, with four in five households experiencing hunger and more than a third starving. Across Gaza, almost all households are now resorting to extremes: adults are not

eating so they can feed children, and people are borrowing food or are consuming nothing at all for 24 hours. Over 60 per cent of Gaza's housing – some 300,000 houses and apartments – has reportedly been destroyed or damaged. Starting on 27 October, Israel Defense Forces has periodically cut off communications within Gaza and to the rest of the world, especially during the conduct of Israeli operations inside Gaza, making humanitarian delivery and response nearly impossible.

40. Access to humanitarian supplies has been severely restricted since 7 October. After two weeks of heavy shelling and bombardment, the first aid convoy of 20 trucks entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing at the border of Egypt on 21 October. Between 21 October and the beginning of the pause on 24 November, an average of 50 trucks per day entered Gaza – about 10 per cent of normal traffic through all crossings in the months leading up to the war. Intensive international engagement, including by the United Nations, resulted in limited increases and the entry of some fuel for UNRWA and other life-saving operations as at 15 November. The seven-day humanitarian pause saw significant increases in the entry of supplies, including fuel, with an average of 170 trucks per day, enabling some aid to reach areas of northern Gaza that had remained inaccessible for weeks. The quantity of aid, which has averaged 80 trucks per day since the pause ended, nevertheless remained wholly insufficient to address the overwhelming need.

41. As at 7 December, nearly 1.9 million people, or nearly 85 per cent of the population, were internally displaced, some multiple times, across the Gaza Strip. This includes nearly 1.2 million people sheltering at 151 UNRWA facilities. Of those facilities, 94 are accommodating some 1 million people in the south at nine times their intended capacity. Since 12 October, Israel has been issuing evacuation orders and warnings to Palestinians in northern Gaza to move to the south, where they were met with limited to no access to shelter, food or water and remained subject to frequent bombardment. Beginning on 4 November, Israeli forces designated a corridor for the residents of Gaza City and northern Gaza to move to the south and announced daily four-hour pauses. An estimated 270,000 people have moved along that corridor, though an unknown number were unable or unwilling to move, including many hospital patients. Israeli forces have arrested people and there have been reports of Israeli forces firing on displaced Palestinians moving through the corridor, while the Israel Defense Forces stated that Hamas was preventing the evacuation of civilians. The United Nations and humanitarian partners carried out several medical evacuations of nearly 150 patients from northern to southern Gaza, including the transportation of dozens of premature babies, patients with spinal injuries and patients receiving dialysis treatment from Shifa' Hospital and Ahli Arab Hospital.

42. A limited number of foreigners, Palestinians with dual nationalities, some staff of international organizations and a significant number of sick or injured Palestinians have been allowed to exit through Egypt. The Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings have remained closed since the Hamas attack on 7 October. On 7 December, the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories announced the decision to use facilities at Kerem Shalom for the inspection of trucks that would enter through Rafah. The Erez crossing was also significantly damaged by Hamas during the 7 October attack and Kerem Shalom has been subject to repeated rocket attacks by Hamas.

43. As at 6 December, Member States had disbursed $405.6 million against an updated $1.2 billion flash appeal launched on 6 November by the United Nations and its partners to implement its humanitarian response. An additional $250 million has been pledged.

44. On 2 November, the Israeli Security Cabinet announced that it would deduct all funds designated for the Gaza Strip, some $73 million or approximately 32.5 per cent, from the clearance revenues Israel transfers on a monthly basis to the Palestinian

Authority. This deduction is in addition to other deductions from the clearance revenues, including the monthly deduction of $12.9 million that Israel calculates as equivalent to payments by the Palestinian Authority to Palestinians whom Israel designates as security prisoners or to the families of Palestinians killed while carrying out attacks against Israelis, under Israeli legislation in place since 2019. The clearance revenues amount to over 65 per cent of the total revenue of the Palestinian Authority. On 6 November, the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine, Mohammad Shtayeh, stated that the Palestinian Authority would not accept the partial transfer.

45. The Israeli Security Cabinet also decided that no Palestinian workers would enter Israel from Gaza moving forward, and that the Palestinian workers who were present in Israel prior to the 7 October attacks would be returned to Gaza. Thousands of Palestinian workers from Gaza were returned to Gaza by Israel using the Kerem Shalom crossing on 3 November, while some were reportedly detained by Israeli security forces and others returned voluntarily with the facilitation of the Palestinian Authority. In the West Bank, most permits for Palestinians working in Israel were suspended, which affected approximately 180,000 workers and resulted in a severe negative impact on the Palestinian economy, alongside strict movement restrictions within the West Bank that further crippled economic activity.

46. The 7 October attacks, and the subsequent hostilities between Israel, Hamas and other armed groups, including ongoing rocket launches and drone attacks, have had a significant social and economic impact in Israel. Schools closed across the country on 7 October and stayed closed for weeks, reopening only gradually – and some schools remaining closed. The call-up of some 360,000 military reservists and the evacuation of over 200,000 people, including foreign workers, from their homes in the north and south of Israel have also led to a significant slowing of economic activity, with many businesses closing and others laying off workers. According to figures published by the Bank of Israel in November, the ongoing absence of hundreds of thousands of Israelis from their jobs is costing the economy an estimated $600 million each week. Travel in and out of the country has also been significantly reduced, with nearly all foreign airlines cancelling their flights in and out of Israel since 7 October. Israeli non-governmental organizations focused on women's rights and gender-based violence have warned that the loosening of gun licensing regulations and the proliferation of guns following 7 October could lead to a rise in domestic abuse and violent incidents targeting women across the country.

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

47. 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.

48. In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council also 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.

49. A number of high-level meetings were held aimed at addressing the current crisis, with many referencing the need to restart efforts towards achieving a two-State solution. On 21 October, the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, hosted a summit in Cairo for regional and international leaders to discuss current developments, the future of the Palestinian cause and the peace process. On 4 November, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Hussein Al-Sheikh, convened in Amman together with the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, for a ministerial summit. On 11 November, Saudi Arabia hosted Muslim and Arab leaders in a joint Organization of Islamic Cooperation-League of Arab States summit in Riyadh to demand an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict and to reaffirm the Arab Peace Initiative.

50. Against the backdrop of significantly heightened violence in the West Bank, on 5 December the United States State Department announced that it was implementing a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals believed to have been involved in undermining peace, security or stability in the West Bank, including through committing acts of violence or taking other actions that unduly restricted civilians' access to essential services and basic necessities. It further stated that immediate family members of such persons also may be subject to these restrictions.

51. An emergency special session of the General Assembly requested by the Arab Group and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was convened from 26 October. On 27 October, the Assembly adopted a resolution co-sponsored by the Group of Arab States and OIC entitled "Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations". Resolution ES-10/21 called for "an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities".

52. On 15 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2712 (2023), which called, inter alia, for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip … to enable … full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners". It also called for "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups, especially children" and for "all parties to refrain from depriving the civilian population in the Gaza Strip of basic services and humanitarian assistance".

VII. Observations

53. I strongly condemn the abhorrent armed attacks by Hamas and others in Israel. Nothing can justify the acts of terror that were committed and the deliberate killing, maiming and abduction of civilians and other protected persons. Accounts of the attacks reveal acts of brutality that are impossible to accept or comprehend. I am appalled by the reports of sexual violence during the attacks; these must be vigorously investigated and prosecuted. The firing of indiscriminate rockets towards Israeli population centres is a violation of international humanitarian law and must cease completely. I welcome the release of 110 Israeli and foreign hostages, in line with Security Council resolution 2712 (2023), and reiterate that all remaining hostages must be treated humanely and immediately and unconditionally released. In the interim, they must be allowed to receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

54. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, under Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, I brought to the attention of the Security Council the situation in Gaza, which, in my opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. More than eight weeks of hostilities in Gaza and Israel have created

appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Civilians throughout Gaza face grave danger. There is no effective protection of civilians. I reiterate my urgent appeal for a humanitarian ceasefire.

55. The violence that has been taking place since 7 October in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory – particularly in and around Gaza – has shaken the region and, most tragically, the lives of millions of Palestinians and Israelis. The scale of death and destruction is shocking, unprecedented and truly unbearable.

56. The magnitude of the Israeli military campaign against Hamas and the scope of death and destruction in Gaza have been unprecedented and unbearable to witness. I unequivocally condemn the killing of civilians in Gaza, including women and children. I mourn the loss of every civilian, including 131 United Nations colleagues – the single largest loss of life in the history of the Organization. I am horrified that Israeli airstrikes have hit protected persons, including journalists, health workers and humanitarian personnel, as well as civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and United Nations facilities. I reiterate that civilians, and civilian infrastructure, must be respected and protected at all times, and the inviolability of United Nations facilities must be honoured and respected.

57. I have expressed repeated concerns over what may be violations of international humanitarian law. The numbers of those killed and injured raise serious questions about compliance with the requirements of distinction, precautions in attack and proportionality. Ordering and directing the massive displacement of the population of northern and central Gaza without ensuring that they will be provided with shelter, food, water, medicine, hygiene, health and safety also raises serious concerns about compliance with the applicable legal requirements. Following the declared siege by Israel of the Gaza Strip until 21 October, the entry of humanitarian supplies have been far below what is required to meet the massive needs of the people in Gaza. The laws of war demand that the parties to a conflict allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need. Millions of Palestinian civilians should not pay the price for the brutality perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups. I am deeply troubled by allegations that Palestinians in Gaza are being used as human shields. Israelis should not have to live under the continual threat of indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza. Such conduct cannot, however, absolve Israel of its own obligations. International humanitarian law cannot be applied selectively. It applies to all parties to a conflict at all times and the obligation to comply with it does not depend on reciprocity. The protection of civilians is paramount in any armed conflict.

58. The continuation and intensification of the conflict in Gaza over the past weeks is deeply alarming. This includes the expansion of ground operations by the Israel Defense Forces to the south, accompanied by relentless and intense airstrikes, the continued launching of rockets from densely populated residential areas towards Israeli population centres and the ongoing threat of escalation in the region. Alongside my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, I am engaged tirelessly with all parties to bring the fighting to an end and avoid any further expansion of the conflict and any further suffering of the civilian populations.

59. I am also deeply concerned by escalating tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which are reaching a boiling point. Intensified armed exchanges between Palestinians and Israeli security forces in the occupied West Bank, predominantly in the context of Israeli operations, have led to exceedingly high levels of arrests and casualties. Over 57 per cent of Palestinian casualties in 2023 occurred in the approximately nine weeks since the Hamas attacks on 7 October. The year 2023 has surpassed 2022 as the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat began recording casualties in 2005. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint, use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life, and conduct thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

60. I am alarmed by the lethal attacks carried out by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and by Palestinians against Israelis in the occupied West Bank and Israel, with some claimed by Hamas. All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice.

61. I urge Israel to take immediate steps to end the unprecedented levels of settler violence and protect the Palestinian population against increasing attacks and incidents of the use of violence and intimidation to drive communities from their homes, sometimes in the proximity of and with the support of Israeli security forces. The year 2023 saw the highest number of such incidents since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began recording data in 2006. Settlers are rarely held accountable for such attacks, increasing the level of threat to Palestinians and their property. I urge Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population and to investigate and hold perpetrators of all attacks accountable.

62. I am deeply concerned about the large number of Palestinians detained by Israeli security forces since 7 October, the increase in the number of Palestinians held in administrative detention, without charge or trial, by Israel since 7 October, and by reports of ill-treatment during arrest.

63. I remain gravely concerned by the impact of the ongoing hostilities on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The current conditions are making it impossible for meaningful humanitarian operations to be conducted. The level of humanitarian assistance that has been allowed into Gaza is completely inadequate and is not proportional to the overwhelming needs of Gaza's population. The United Nations needs the predictable entry of more food, shelter materials, medicine and fuel. Its ability to repair essential, life-saving infrastructure is critical. The predictable entry of commercial goods into the Gaza Strip is also critical, given that humanitarian assistance alone cannot meet the needs of 2.2 million people. I am grateful to Egypt for its constructive engagement in facilitating humanitarian access and welcome the opening of the Rafah crossing for the exit of some sick and wounded Palestinians. In line with Security Council resolution 2712 (2023), I reiterate the need to open the Kerem Shalom crossing point to allow for the entry of humanitarian supplies. I also note the adoption of Council resolution 2712 (2023), the first Council resolution on this agenda item since 2016. I underscore the importance of its implementation by the parties, which to date has been woefully insufficient in the face of the epic humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. I urge the Council to continue to do its utmost to end this terrible suffering.

64. I welcome the arrangement and commend the facilitation efforts of the Governments of Egypt, Qatar and the United States that enabled the release of 78 hostages abducted on 7 October by Hamas and others, as well as the seven-day humanitarian pause and the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli jails. The joyous reunion of families and the momentary respite from the hostilities in Gaza and the entry of life-saving aid must be a starting point for the release of all remaining hostages and a humanitarian ceasefire that will end the devastating hostilities in Gaza.

65. I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that is impeding access by Palestinians to their land and resources and threatening the viability of a future

independent Palestinian State. The ever-growing settlement footprint, including outposts, contributes to a rise in settler-related violence and further entrenches the Israeli military occupation, hampering the free movement of the Palestinian population and undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

66. This year has seen the most advancements or approvals of housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since the United Nations began systematically tracking advancements in 2017. Overall, in 2023, plans for nearly 24,700 housing units were advanced, approved or tendered, more than double the approximately 11,700 units in 2022. In Area C, the number almost tripled as plans for approximately 14,700 housing units were advanced or approved, compared with approximately 5,300 in 2022. Some 1,260 housing units were tendered in 2023 compared with 159 in 2022, a nearly eight-fold increase. In occupied East Jerusalem, plans for over 8,540 units were advanced or approved, compared with some 5,800 in 2022. I am alarmed by the unprecedented high number of plans for housing units that were advanced in 2023, as well as by the 18 June decision by the Government of Israel to remove the requirement for ministerial approval at interim stages of settlement planning and delegate this authority to the Additional Minister in the Ministry of Defense, which may expedite the process of settlement expansion.

67. I reiterate that all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and are in flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity immediately, in line with its obligations under international law.

68. I remain deeply concerned by the continued demolition and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures. Demolitions of and evictions from property, including internationally funded humanitarian projects, as well as structures related to income generation and the provision of essential services, entail numerous human rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer. I again call upon the Government of Israel to immediately end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and prevent the possible displacement and forced eviction of Palestinians, in line with its international obligations, and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs.

69. I am appalled at the numerous instances during the reporting period of officials glorifying violence and encouraging the killing of civilians, including in relation to the acts of terror Hamas carried out on 7 October or to Israeli military operations in Gaza. Such rhetoric is abhorrent and must be clearly rejected by leaders on all sides. Leaders have an obligation to clearly and explicitly condemn acts of terror and violence directed against civilians. The widespread incitement to violence we have witnessed during the present reporting period has clearly fanned the flames of war and will only lead to more bloodshed. It must stop immediately.

70. I reiterate and amplify my call to the parties for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be respected and upheld, taking into account the special and historic role of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

71. I am deeply concerned about the precipitated fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority. Without an immediate injection of capital or international financing and assistance, the Palestinian Authority faces a fiscal crisis, affecting basic service provision, the provision of full civil servant salary payments and debt servicing. I urge Israel to reverse its decision to withhold Gaza-related deductions and for the international community to resume emergency financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

72. Even as the hostilities in Gaza rage on and we focus on the immediate challenges, we must begin work on what comes next. There is much we cannot know about how

those hostilities will end and what realities will lie before us, but there are some principles that are clear: any post-hostility scenario will require strengthening and supporting the Palestinian Authority, as part of a viable strategy to restore Palestinian governance to Gaza under a single, legitimate Palestinian Government within a clearly defined objective of achieving the two-State solution, in line with long-held principles. The region has a critical role to play in envisioning and realizing a peaceful and prosperous future for an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza is an integral part. A serious strategic dialogue on these issues is urgently needed.

73. Today, UNRWA serves as the key lifeline for the population of Gaza amid a complete humanitarian catastrophe, as it is sheltering over a million people, running health centres and distributing life-saving aid. The Agency is also delivering essential services for Palestine refugees in the West Bank amid record-breaking violence, and in the wider region amid simmering tensions and socioeconomic problems. Despite this, UNRWA continues to suffer from chronic underfunding. For UNRWA to be able to continue to play a key stabilizing role in the region and remain the international community's trusted partner to facilitate the humanitarian response in Gaza, it is essential that it receive strong political and financial support from Member States to find solutions for a sustainable model with predictable and sufficient income.

74. This war has, once again, served as a devastating and tragic reminder that there is no substitute for a legitimate political process that will resolve the core issues driving the conflict. Israelis, Palestinians, the States of the region and the broader international community must urgently take steps that will enable the parties to re-engage on the long-delayed political path to achieve a two-State solution.

75. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in ending the occupation and resolving the conflict in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State – living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

76. I express my deep appreciation to my Special Coordinator and his team for their outstanding service in what remains a challenging context. I also pay tribute to all United Nations personnel who have lost their lives in this conflict and to all the heroic humanitarian aid workers who remain committed to their work despite the enormous danger to their health and lives.