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Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, the twelfth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), provides a review and assessment of the implementation of the resolution since my previous report on the subject, which was delivered orally by my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, on 20 September 2019. The report covers developments from 12 September to 6 December 2019.

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. 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. During the reporting period, some 3,000 housing units in the occupied West Bank, including 300 in East Jerusalem, were advanced or approved by the Israeli authorities. The plans include 182 units in Mevo'ot Yericho, an outpost in the Jordan Valley that the Government of Israel decided, on 15 September, to retroactively legalize as a new settlement. Other notable plans include 382 units in Dolev, west of Ramallah, and 609 units in the large urban settlement of Beitar Elit, west of Bethlehem. Some 40 per cent of the units advanced are to be built in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank. No new tenders were announced.

4. On 15 September, a new farm comprising one portable housing unit was reportedly established by Israeli settlers in Umm al-Hawa, east of the Kedar settlement, in Area C of the West Bank. The settlers reportedly claimed that they had bought the land from the Palestinian owners, which the latter deny. A petition was filed by the owners before the High Court of Justice, where a discussion is scheduled for 20 January 2020.



5. On 1 December, the Defense Minister of Israel instructed the Civil Administration to act “to advance planning procedures” for a new structure for Israeli settlers in the wholesale market in the Old City of Hebron.

6. On several occasions during the reporting period, Israeli authorities reportedly demolished structures or prevented construction in settlement outposts, including near Yitzhar, Bat Ayin and Kokhav HaShahar, resulting in clashes between settlers and Israeli security forces.

7. During the reporting period, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, Israeli authorities demolished or seized 150 structures, resulting in the displacement of 260 people, including 133 children and some 60 women, and leaving 1,800 others affected. A total of 16 of the structures were demolished on the basis of military order No. 1797, which authorizes an expedited process that gives owners only 96 hours to demonstrate that they possess a valid building permit. The demolitions in Area C included 26 donor-funded structures.

III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

8. 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, 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.

9. The reporting period, however, was characterized by acts of violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the firing of rockets, mortars and incendiary devices by Palestinian militants from Gaza against civilians in Israel and the use by Israel of lethal force against Palestinians.

10. Overall, 44 Palestinians, including 9 children and 3 women, were killed by Israeli security forces as a result of air strikes and during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents and 2,940 Palestinians were injured, including some 400 Palestinians by live ammunition. A total of 46 Israelis, including 41 civilians, a number of whom were women and children, and 5 members of the Israeli security forces were injured in attacks, clashes and other incidents. On 17 September 2019, one Israeli woman succumbed to wounds she sustained during a rocket attack from Gaza in November 2018.

11. On 1 November, some 10 rockets were launched from Gaza towards Israel, one of which hit a house in Sderot, causing damage but no injuries. In response, the Israel Defense Forces targeted what they identified as various Hamas military sites across Gaza. One Palestinian militant was killed and two others were injured.

12. Over a 48-hour period of escalation, from 12 to 14 November, following the targeted killing by Israel of a commander of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Palestinian Islamic Jihad launched more than 500 rockets towards Israel. According to the Israel Defense Forces, the interception rate by the Iron Dome system was 90 per cent, while some rockets landed in Israeli towns and cities, causing property damage. Shelters across large parts of the country were activated, schools and businesses remained closed for at least a day and 78 Israelis were treated for injuries or shock.

13. In response, the Israel Defense Forces conducted a number of strikes against what they identified as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant targets in Gaza,

killing 33 Palestinians, including 3 women and 8 children, and injuring 109 others, including 51 children and 11 women. At least 20 of those killed were identified as Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants. Eight members of a family, including five children, were killed in a single Israeli strike. Another family member succumbed to his wounds a few days later. The Israel Defense Forces admitted that the family's home had been mistakenly targeted and launched an investigation. In addition, one Palestinian was reportedly killed by a rocket launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants that had fallen short inside Gaza.

14. Following an intense mediation effort, Egypt, working closely with my Special Coordinator, was able to ensure that calm in Gaza was restored, after 48 hours of hostilities.

15. The situation escalated briefly again on 26 November, when two rockets were fired by Palestinian militants towards Israel. According to the Israel Defense Forces, one rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome system and the other landed in an open area in southern Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces struck a number of militant targets in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

16. During the reporting period, protests at the Gaza perimeter fence continued. While most demonstrations remained relatively peaceful, some protesters engaged in violent activities, including using improvised explosive devices, attempting to breach the fence or launching incendiary balloons towards Israel. The Israel Defense Forces responded with riot dispersal means, including tear gas, and live ammunition. A total of 5 demonstrators were killed and 1,746 demonstrators were injured, including 790 children and 60 women.

17. During the reporting period, in the occupied West Bank, 4 Palestinians were shot and killed, including 1 woman, and 1,064 Palestinians were injured, including 23 children, by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents. Nine Israelis, including five members of the Israeli security forces, were also injured.

18. On 18 September, a private security agent working for the Israeli security forces shot and killed a 50-year-old Palestinian woman at the Qalandiya checkpoint while she was allegedly attempting to carry out a stabbing attack against personnel of the Israeli security forces. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), eyewitnesses reported that the woman was left to bleed for 30 minutes before an Israeli medical crew arrived. On 18 October, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 25-year-old Palestinian man near the Jbara checkpoint, south of Tulkarm, for allegedly carrying out a stabbing attack against Israeli security forces.

19. On 25 September, a 20-year-old Israeli woman was injured in a stabbing attack carried out on route 443. The alleged perpetrator, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy, was arrested by Israeli security forces. A total of six stabbing attacks by Palestinians against Israelis were reported during the reporting period.

20. According to OHCHR, in the H2 zone of Hebron, on 3, 5 and 6 November, while school was in session, Israeli security forces reportedly fired a number of tear-gas canisters and stun grenades into two school compounds, in response to an incident on 3 November during which a few children reportedly threw stones at a military patrol nearby.

21. On 11 November, a 22-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli security forces near Hebron in circumstances that indicate that he was not posing a threat. The Israel Defense Forces has launched an investigation into the incident.

22. On 15 November, a Palestinian journalist lost an eye after being shot by Israeli security forces while covering a demonstration in Surif village, north of Hebron.
23. On 26 November, Fatah assembled thousands of Palestinian protesters to take part in a “day of rage” across the occupied West Bank, during which some groups clashed with Israeli security forces.
24. Despite attempts to find an agreement between the residents of Isawiyah and Israeli authorities to reduce the activities of Israeli security forces near schools and allow the school year to begin on schedule in early September, Israeli security forces continued to conduct frequent night raids, searches and arrests in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood.
25. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 106 attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, with 40 injuries resulting from 21 of those incidents, and 88 of the incidents resulting in damage to Palestinian-owned properties. The Office also recorded 19 attacks by Palestinians against Israeli settlers in the West Bank, with four injuries resulting from 4 of the attacks and with 15 resulting in damage to settler-owned properties.
26. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded a high number of incidents during the olive harvesting season, including incidents of physical assault against Palestinian farmers by Israeli settlers, the stealing of produce and the harassment of farmers, as well as damage to some 1,700 olive trees. On 16 October, Palestinian farmers and Israeli and foreign volunteers harvesting olive trees near Burin village were attacked by residents of the Yitzhar settlement, using stones and metal rods. An 80-year-old rabbi and four foreign volunteers were injured. One of the perpetrators of the attacks was arrested.
27. Incidents of violence also occurred in the Old City of Hebron, in the H2 zone. On the weekend of 22 and 23 November, tens of thousands of Israelis visited the city as part of a religious observance. Over the course of that weekend, 30 Palestinians, including 7 children, and 1 Israeli were injured in attacks and clashes with Israeli settlers.
28. During the reporting period, there were some developments regarding ongoing cases before Israeli authorities pertaining to the perpetrators of acts of violence. On 29 October, following a plea bargain that led to the first conviction of an Israeli soldier for actions related to the weekly protests along the Gaza perimeter fence, an Israeli military court reportedly sentenced the soldier to a month of imprisonment for having shot dead a 14-year-old Palestinian boy. On 24 October, a district court convicted one of the Israeli suspects for the arson attack in the West Bank village of Duma in 2015, who pleaded guilty of involvement in several other attacks against Palestinians. The suspect was also convicted of membership in a terrorist organization. On 14 November, an Israeli settler was indicted for an incident in which he fired a gun in the air and threw stones towards the Palestinian village of Burin.

IV. Incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric

29. 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.

30. On its social media pages, Fatah continued to glorify perpetrators of past terrorist attacks against Israelis, and some Palestinian officials attended events honouring those who had carried out the attacks. A Fatah official referred to Israel as a “biological bomb” that was poisoning the entire region. Some officials and official publications engaged in spreading conspiracy theories, accusing Israel of “planting diseases” in the bodies of Palestinian prisoners or intending to use a hospital being built in Gaza by a non-governmental organization to conduct “experiments on the sick Palestinians” and “trafficking in human organs”. A Fatah member of the Revolutionary Council also compared Israel to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, claiming that they were “twins”. Hamas leaders also continued to use provocative and threatening language, including threatening one senior Israeli political leader that he would “regret the day” he was born.

31. Several Israeli officials also continued to make inflammatory statements. Vows to annex the Jordan Valley and Israeli settlements were reiterated by senior politicians, with one senior official saying that Israel had the “full right” to apply its sovereignty over the Jordan Valley. A series of derogatory and inflammatory statements were aimed by political leaders towards Israeli Arabs, including calling them an “existential threat to the State of Israel”. One minister said that Palestinians and Israeli Arabs were “still here” only because Israelis were “hospitable”, adding “at least for now”. Other Israeli officials referred to the Palestinian people as “fictitious and made-up”.

V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

32. 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. While some positive developments can be reported, a number of negative trends overshadow them.

33. Significant progress was made in the implementation of the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza, endorsed in September 2018 by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians.

34. As reported by the United Nations during the biannual meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, held in New York on 26 September 2019, the interventions have had an important impact across many sectors. In 2019, the daily availability of electricity in Gaza increased to an average of nearly 12–15 hours. This has increased the volume of water and wastewater that can be treated, reduced the need for expensive fuel to run hospitals and lowered costs for private businesses and families. As at 6 December, almost 660,000 people in Gaza had benefited from emergency health care and nearly 580,000 had benefited from the delivery of drugs and medical supplies since the implementation of the interventions. Temporary job creation programmes set up by the United Nations have also produced more than 30,000 jobs so far, and work is progressing on reviving an industrial zone to create long-term economic opportunities.

35. At the end of October and November, the Office for Gaza Reconstruction distributed its monthly humanitarian cash payments of \$100 per family to 75,000 needy families in Gaza.

36. There was also, during the reporting period, some easing of the restrictions on the movement of people to and from Gaza. On 28 October, Israeli authorities removed 150 individuals from the list of 260 Gaza-based national staff of United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organization prohibited from exiting

Gaza and began issuing permits for them to travel to the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

37. On 3 October, an agreement was reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which resulted in the transfer of some \$425 million of clearance revenues to the Palestinian Authority.

38. On 26 September, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, announced at the General Assembly his intention to set a date for Palestinian elections. On 27 November, Hamas provided a written response, accepting the election plan and the terms laid out in the President's letter to the Central Elections Commission of the State of Palestine. Throughout the process, the United Nations, including through my Special Coordinator, has been consistently engaged with senior Palestinian officials and different factions in efforts towards holding inclusive elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

39. On 21 October, the Palestinian Cabinet decided to advance amendments to the Palestinian civil status law in favour of women, including increasing the minimum age of marriage and granting women the right to manage their children's bank accounts.

40. On 11 November, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) launched a programme to support the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda in the State of Palestine, including the development of the Palestinian national action plan for the next four years on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

41. In Gaza, while the reconstruction and repair of some 160 houses was completed during the reporting period, no new funding has been disbursed towards the housing reconstruction effort since February 2019, and there is still a funding gap of \$45 million, which is needed to complete the reconstruction of 1,268 entirely destroyed homes, and of another \$75 million, which is needed to repair 56,050 partially damaged homes.

42. Despite continued progress on the implementation of the package of interventions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, the humanitarian and socioeconomic situations in Gaza remain dire. The long-standing shortage of medical supplies continues to be a major concern. Of all the supplies, 46 per cent are at critically low levels and 41 per cent are totally depleted. Increased support to the health sector by the Palestinian Authority will therefore be required, at a time of growing needs and reduced humanitarian funding. Support for health should not be determined by political considerations, but by needs. Health-care providers continue to struggle to treat those injured during the demonstrations. Overall, 58 per cent of patients who sought treatment outside Gaza during the reporting period were granted permits by Israel. Of the patients who were injured during the demonstrations, 18 per cent of those seeking treatment outside Gaza were granted permits by Israel. The socioeconomic situation in Gaza also remains grim, as the unemployment rate remains at almost 45 per cent. With limited economic opportunities, vulnerable communities have fallen into a cycle of indebtedness in order to meet their most pressing needs. Overall, an estimated 1.7 million Palestinians are considered food insecure, and funding gaps are hindering efforts to reach the entirety of the population in need.

43. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face serious financial challenges, including the lowest ever cash flow levels and an outstanding funding shortfall of \$167 million. The Agency is weeks away from having to halt salary payments to 30,000 staff delivering essential services to millions of Palestine refugees and to 22,000 teachers responsible for educating more than half a million children – half of whom are in Gaza. At the

meeting of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA on 26 November, key donors committed to disbursing funds.

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

44. 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.

45. On 12 November, the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a ruling, determining that “foodstuffs originating in the territories occupied by the State of Israel must bear the indication of their territory of origin, accompanied, where those foodstuffs come from an Israeli settlement within that territory, by the indication of that provenance”, in order for the indication of origin to be correct and not misleading for the consumer.

46. 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 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. There were no developments regarding such efforts.

47. On 18 November, the United States of America announced that it no longer viewed “the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank” as “per se, inconsistent with international law”.

VII. Observations¹

48. I remain gravely concerned by the continued increase in the number of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In Area C settlements, some 10,000 units were advanced or approved in 2019, compared with some 6,800 in each of the previous two years. At the same time, tenders were announced for 700 units, compared with more than 3,000 in both 2017 and 2018. In East Jerusalem, some 1,100 units were advanced, marking a decline compared with 2017 (2,300) and 2018 (2,100), and tenders were announced for some 600 units, approximately the same as in 2018 and higher than in 2017, when no tenders were announced. Approximately one third of the 12,400 units advanced, approved or tendered in 2019 are planned for settlements in outlying locations deep inside the West Bank, a marked increase compared with about one quarter of the total 13,300 units in 2018 and about one fifth of the total 12,200 units in 2017.

49. Overall, since the adoption of Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), settlement planning and construction have continued. Over the past three years, plans for more than 22,000 units were advanced or approved in Area C and East Jerusalem settlements and tenders were announced for more than 8,000 units. On the ground, the construction of more than 5,000 new units began in Area C during the same period.

¹ As December marks the annual anniversary of the adoption of resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in line with standard practice, the observations provided in the last quarterly report of the calendar year draw on annual trends and themes observed throughout the year.

50. I reiterate that the establishment of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has no legal effect and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law, as stated in resolution 2334 (2016), and must cease immediately and completely. The existence and expansion of settlements fuel resentment and hopelessness among the Palestinian population and significantly heighten Israeli-Palestinian tensions. In addition, they continue to undermine the prospects for ending the occupation and achieving the two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous and viable Palestinian State. In this context, I regret the announcement made by the United States on 18 November that it no longer viewed “the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank” as “per se, inconsistent with international law”.

51. I remain deeply concerned by the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures, which have included internationally funded humanitarian projects. Demolitions in Area C increased in 2019, with 365 Palestinian-owned structures demolished, representing a 38 per cent increase compared with 264 in 2017 and a 36 per cent increase compared with 268 in 2018, and the number of people displaced has more than doubled, with 464 people displaced in 2019 compared with 216 in 2018. In East Jerusalem, 194 structures were demolished in 2019, representing a 13 per cent increase compared with 2018, and the number of Palestinians displaced has more than doubled, with 325 people displaced in 2019 compared with 158 in 2018. The eviction of a Palestinian family in the Old City of Jerusalem in February and the high number of Palestinian households in occupied East Jerusalem with eviction cases filed against them are also very concerning. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law.

52. I remain gravely concerned about the continuing violence, terrorist attacks against civilians and incitement to violence that greatly exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and are incompatible with a peaceful resolution. There is no justification for terrorism, and I call upon all members of the international community to join the United Nations in condemning it unequivocally. The launching of rockets and mortars and its indiscriminate effect on Israeli civilian population centres is prohibited by international humanitarian law, and Palestinian militants must cease this practice immediately.

53. The security situation in Gaza remains very fragile, with three serious military escalations in 2019. The killing of nine members of a family whose home was mistakenly targeted in an Israeli air strike must be thoroughly investigated.

54. The situation in Gaza continues to be at risk of a major escalation, and the immense suffering of the people continues. I remain gravely concerned by the number of deaths and injuries of Palestinians along the Gaza perimeter fence. Serious concerns remain over the use of force by Israel during the Gaza protests at the perimeter fence. Israeli security forces have the responsibility to exercise maximum restraint, and intentional lethal force may be used only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. The relevant authorities and the organizers of protests in Gaza must ensure that protests remain peaceful. Children should never be the target of violence, and Hamas and other militant groups have an obligation to protect children, by ensuring that they are never put in harm's way.

55. I am concerned by reports of an increased number of attacks and incidents of harassment attributed to settlers, including during the olive harvesting season and in Hebron, and call for further measures to ensure that Israel fulfils its obligation to protect Palestinian civilians from all acts or threats of violence, including by Israeli settlers, and to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for attacks.

56. Provocative and inflammatory rhetoric during the reporting period continued to deepen the divide, fuel mistrust and hatred between the parties and undermine efforts

to advance the goal of peace. Leaders and officials must set a tone that encourages tolerance and facilitates increased dialogue, rather than using their public platform to further escalate tensions. I am particularly appalled by, and call upon all to join the United Nations in condemning as unacceptable, all racist and inflammatory statements that aim to spread fear and hatred among people. I am also concerned by the continued statements on the prospect of annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank. Such steps, if implemented, would constitute a serious violation of international law. They would be devastating to the possibility of reviving negotiations and regional peace, while severely undermining the viability of the two-State solution.

57. September marked one year since the start of the implementation of the United Nations package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza. The efforts to date have achieved important results, yet the situation remains fragile, with the constant threat of renewed conflict alongside the continuation of a harsh Israeli closure regime, the lack of progress on intra-Palestinian unity and continued insecurity and militant activity. The volatile dynamics in Gaza are exacerbated by rampant poverty and sky-high unemployment, while the provision of basic services, including health care and water, still falls far short of demand. Some of the funding from investments made as a result of efforts by the United Nations will run out by 31 December, and without additional funding and a durable Israeli and Palestinian commitment, the situation in Gaza could, once again, be pushed to the brink of collapse.

58. The impact on women of the ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis in Gaza is of particular concern. Some 70 per cent of all women in Gaza are unemployed, resulting in female-headed households being more likely to face poverty and food insecurity. Poverty and a lack of economic opportunities also remain key factors behind violence against women in Gaza, while the humanitarian crisis has resulted in a large number of health issues for women. The United Nations continues to provide assistance to Palestinian women and girls across a broad range of areas, but much more needs to be done to ensure that their needs are addressed.

59. I take this opportunity to reiterate that no amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will resolve either the situation in Gaza or the broader conflict. Gaza ultimately requires political solutions. 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 there be hope that the humanitarian crisis will be sustainably resolved. It is also crucial to end the militant build-up in Gaza and the threat of rocket attacks, and I reiterate my call upon Hamas to provide full information regarding the Israeli nationals who are being held in Gaza.

60. I welcome the ongoing discussions on the holding of Palestinian general elections. If elections are held, they will be the first Palestinian elections since 2006, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions. The international community should support this process, with a view to strengthening national unity rather than division. As has been emphasized to all interlocutors by the United Nations, including by my Special Coordinator, the critical elements required for elections to be credible are the following: first, they must be organized across the Occupied Palestinian Territory – in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza – in line with the Basic Law for the Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, electoral legislation and international best practices; second, both legislative and presidential elections are necessary and should be held within a clearly identified and reasonable time frame; and third, broad intra-Palestinian agreement must be reached on the modalities of holding elections.

61. 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 West Bank under a single, democratic, national government. Only then can the international community hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis and begin the important task of development. Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

62. Despite the agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 3 October on clearance revenues, underlying disagreements between the two parties remain, including over the deductions by Israel. This leaves the Palestinian economy vulnerable to sudden deterioration. It remains critical that both sides engage in a constructive manner with the goal of restoring the revenue transfers in full, in line with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. They must do their utmost to prevent a further deterioration and to recommit, with the support of the international community, to the basic tenets enshrined in long-standing bilateral agreements.

63. I note the criticality of providing continued support for UNRWA, as its financial situation has continued to worsen. Urgent disbursement of donor funds is essential to ensure that operations continue until the end of 2019.

64. December marks three years since the adoption by the Security Council of resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). The situation on the ground since then has only deteriorated. Settlements have expanded significantly, demolitions have accelerated, violence and incitement have continued, achieving intra-Palestinian unity remains elusive and credible negotiations have yet to be launched. I remain greatly concerned by the challenges to the international consensus to achieve an end to the occupation and the realization of a negotiated two-State solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the 1967 lines and on the basis of 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. I call for the renewal of collective efforts to this end.

65. I reiterate the call for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be upheld in line with the special and historical role of Jordan as custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

66. In the absence of a renewed commitment of the parties and the international community to pursue concrete measures that will lead to genuine political progress, the situation is destined to steadily worsen. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is currently in an incredibly fragile phase, with the occupation deepening, political uncertainty prevailing and the volatile regional dynamics threatening to further destabilize the situation. I once again urge leaders on all sides to summon the necessary political will to take concrete steps in support of ending the occupation and realizing a lasting peace – a peace that will allow Palestinians to achieve their right to self-determination and independent statehood and result in two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

67. 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.