

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (spoke in Spanish):

We are grateful for the briefing by the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Our delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to be affected by a complex political reality — the product of war, foreign interference and terrorism — all of which are the direct result of military interventionism and the lack of a political agreement to resolve the region's conflicts. The deadlock in the peace process between Israel and Palestine represents the primary obstacle to the stability of the region. For that reason, we will focus our remarks on that issue.

In the complex scenario of the region, the solution of the issue of Israel's occupation of Palestine remains deadlocked in terms of the political process, while at the same time the occupying Power is deepening its colonization of Palestinian land. Such actions continue apace in the light of the apathy of the Security Council, which is making no effort to demand that Israel cease its acts of violence against the Palestinian population and end its illegal expansionist and settlement policies on Palestinian land. There can be no doubt that this inactivity on the part of the Council is fuelling the impunity with which Israel acts, as it continues to commit a whole range of acts of aggression against Palestinian men, women and children.

We would like to highlight some of the major serious obstacles to the two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The prolonged Israeli occupation has been exploited to consolidate the settlement policy on Palestinian territory. By way of illustration, look no further than the support of the Israeli Government for the settlers, which increased in 2015 compared with the figures for previous years. It is noteworthy that during the first three months of 2016, settlement construction increased 250 per cent compared with the same period of the previous year. All of this is reflected in the expansion of the illegal occupation of the territory: today there are more than 650,000 settlers living in more than 260 settlements in the West Bank, including neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. To this we would add the seizure of Palestinian land, which is carried out by the simple proclamation by the Israeli authorities declaring such land State land or State property.

In addition to the settlement policy, let me stress that the Israelis are continuing to demolish houses, in some cases on the baseless excuse of the lack of a building permit by the Palestinians. In other instances, the Israelis use the pretext of applying collective punishment to Palestinian families for crimes alleged to have been committed by certain members of those families.

As a result of these abusive practices, between January and April 2016 the Israeli authorities demolished 586 houses or structures of other kinds in vulnerable communities in the region, particularly in the area known as Area C. Their actions left more than 700 individuals homeless. The occupying Power does not seem to care that many of the buildings destroyed were constructed thanks to international support and seems indifferent to the fact that many demolitions are carried out in areas where Palestinian families live in poverty, and that being left homeless means that they have no choice but to swell the ranks of refugees. Israeli settlements are illegal, and the Security Council should be able to muster the political unity necessary to condemn them, as the entire international community hopes to see it do.

The situation of violence in the country is also extremely sad, and it is sad to hear the victims' personal stories of violence. But we have to make sure to put the situation in the proper context. We could fill

this Chamber with the victims of violence in Palestine. We could fill the General Assembly Hall. This is just to try to give the Council an idea of what is happening in Palestine and of its scale and magnitude.

The origin of all this suffering is the illegal occupation by Israel. The situation of violence in the occupied territories is worrisome owing to the ongoing criminal actions of the occupying Power against the inhabitants of Palestine, under the pretext of the need to increase security to respond to the acts committed by Palestinians targeting Israelis. Our country unequivocally condemns such acts. However, because we understand that the root cause of the violence is the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and given the differences in strength between Israel and Palestine, we denounce with even greater vigour the disproportionate response, including administrative detention, collective punishment and extrajudicial executions, of the occupying Power against the Palestinian population.

In a similar vein, we denounce administrative detentions, which violate human rights and which have been increasing to include even minors. Reports indicate that 78 per cent of the Palestinians held in Israeli detention facilities, that is, almost 5,400 individuals, including 264 minors, are considered to be prisoners for security reasons and thus suffer conditions that are harsher than those of the prison population in general.

Arbitrary arrests of Palestinians by Israel are often linked to torture and abuse by the occupying Power. A recently published report indicates that of the 149 Palestinians murdered by the Israeli Defence Forces in 2015, 77 were killed during incidents related to attacks against Israel, whereas the other 72 died as the result of disproportionate action and aggression by the occupying Power at checkpoints, while it was cracking down on protests or carrying out routine operations. In many of these cases, the victims did not pose any threat whatsoever to the security or the well-being of the repressive authorities. We urge that all those involved in such crimes targeting innocent and defenceless citizens stand trial and hope that the day will come when impunity ends and Israel will be held accountable.

Faced with this pattern of systemic violence targeting the Palestinians, we urge the Council to take account of the call to establish an international protection system for the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 904 (1994). In that framework, and as we have previously suggested in this body, we could consider contemplating a presence by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations system that are already deployed in Palestine. Within the limits of their specific competencies, they could play a protection-of-civilians role.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be delicate, as a result of the blockade and siege to which the population has been subjected since 2007. This latter step exacerbates the military aggression perpetrated by Israel during Operation Defensive Shield in 2014, which took the lives of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians and 551 children.

International efforts for the reconstruction of Gaza have been hampered by lack of cooperation on the part of Israel and the continued blockade. The repair and rebuilding of houses, schools, hospitals and service infrastructures are seriously undermined by Israeli restrictions on the entry and exit of goods and materials to and from Gaza, as well as the threat of fresh attacks and destruction by Israel. Israel must lift the inhumane blockade to which it is subjecting the people of Palestine and Gaza, which is a clear violation of international humanitarian law.

We believe that the Palestinian question is one of the most egregious failures of the Security Council. The Council has deceived the millions of Palestinians who, for more than 60 years, have trusted it to take action as the guarantor of international peace and security in the quest for a solution to the

conflict. Nonetheless, the occupation and the settlement process in the Palestinian territory not only persists but continues to expand, taking many lives and causing unremitting violence in the region.

Palestine is the victim of one of the most serious tragedies and injustices in modern history. Certain members of the Council are directly responsible for the inaction of this body in the face of this tragedy. We are wondering how long the Palestinian people must wait. Why does the Security Council sit by silently and allow the mass violation of human rights and international humanitarian law by Israel? Why does the Security Council maintain double standards on this matter? How many more Palestinian children must die before the Council reacts?

This issue can be resolved only on the political track, and we therefore welcome all of the efforts currently under way on various fronts to breathe new life into the peace process, which has been moribund for more than 20 years now. We will consider in good faith and in a constructive spirit any initiative that would allow us to make headway in negotiations conducive to rekindling peace negotiations on an equal footing between Palestinians and Israelis and based on a political, negotiated and inclusive solution that would bring a definitive end to the conflict in the framework of the two-State solution, with full acceptance of the right of the Palestinian people to live within internationally recognized borders, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. All of these represent the key elements in the negotiations. They cannot be changed. We must avoid any action on the ground that could threaten the two-State solution. We believe that all the initiatives, such as that of the Quartet, the Arab League Initiative and the French initiative, must adhere to those principles in order to achieve a positive outcome.

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