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**United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting: Protection of the Palestinian Civilian Population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

EGYPT: Ladies and Gentleman, I would like to begin by welcoming the representatives of the member states of the Security Council and the United Nations. I also welcome members of the Council as well as the co-chairs who have participated in this, Angola, Venezuela, Malaysia and Senegal.

This meeting is the fruit of the initiative of a third of the Security Council members, which reflects the importance of the subject that we'll be taking up today, and that is Protection of the Palestinian Civilian Population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Palestinian population is entitled to protection in Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank. And this is not a question that has arisen daily over the past five years. So one need only look to the suffering of this population, which has been suffering bombings in Gaza, which was practically destroyed in 2014. One need only mention the illegal settlements and the destruction of homes beyond the Green Line, including in East Jerusalem. This population has been besieged. There have been public and immediate executions and atrocities publicly committed. These acts will never be forgotten. The acts of the extremists and the settlers will never be forgotten.

Now, the question of the right of the Palestinian population to protection has arisen on several occasions and we documented in the note that was circulated to you. We are meeting today within the framework of the Arria formula [informal flexible Security Council meetings with invited speakers, not called for in the UN Charter], and the Security Council is this guarantor of international peace and security, and I will quote the resolution that enshrines the right of Palestinians to protection. It's—as the Security Council, we observe the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 of August 1949 is applicable to the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem.

Ladies and gentlemen, the acceptance of the right to protection is not in and of itself enough. The population has been suffering atrocities and innocent people are dying, and today what we're seeking to do is to find a way to translate this protection into reality and to base ourselves on similar international experiences that were addressed in the study that was prepared by the Secretary-General and which was provided to members of the Council last year.

And it is for this reason and having regard to the need to take nonconventional measures to guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians, the Security Council members saw that it was important to organize this to hear from specialists in this field. And here I wish to thank all the representatives of organizations that are taking part in this meeting. We would like to thank them for their contribution which will be critical to the debate on the need to provide protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

And let me now give the floor to Malaysia, one of the Co-Chairs.

MALAYSIA: Thank you, Ambassador. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, at the outset, we would like to present a short movie entitled, *My Mother's Wing*. It is a virtual reality film, so our assistants will help to distribute the special headsets to council members and to help them put the headset on. Please go ahead.

This eight-minute film recounts the experience of a young Palestinian mother in Gaza, who is trying to cope with the loss of two of her children in the bombing of the UNRWA school in July 2014 and the impact of that loss and the situation as a whole on her family and community. Unfortunately, we don't have enough headsets for everybody in this room. However, we will show the movie on the screen, but without the 3D or virtual reality effects.

And for those who would like to view the movie with the headsets, you may wish to do so after this meeting, so I would like to encourage you to stay on after the meeting to experience Gaza via virtual reality technology.

*My Mother's Wing*

[Music] All our lives, my family and I have only known of life within these wars, and it has released me. There is nowhere to go beyond this. My name is Somaia Okal. I'm 37 years old. We were living a simple life. I used to work in a kindergarten. Our neighborhood was heavily bombarded during the last war, but we are grateful for our life and are okay with the destiny God chose for us.

My husband used to transport rigs, but is now driving a taxi while I raise our children. When he's not busy, he drives us to market. Many people lost their homes in the previous war, rebuilt them, only to have them destroyed again. We try to make a normal life for our children, but no one knows how long the calm will last before it all happens again.

On 17th July, we had to move out of our own home because of the bombing where we live. We took shelter in the UNRWA schools, as instructed. On the 30th of July, the Occupation fired shells on that school. The dust from the missile blinded our eyes and closed our ears. I lost two of my children.

I send a message to my son, Osam, and my son, Ehab, that you are in my heart. Mother will never forget you. Your memory is forever, and I will keep praying for you. Allah protect them and have mercy on them. My wish from God is that Allah keeps every son under his mother's wing because I live deprived, and I never wish anyone would experience this.

The loss has been difficult for all of us, especially Mussah, my middle child. He used to be a good student, and now he doesn't want to go to school, and the teacher says he cries for no reason. For now, the war is over. Mussah wakes up many nights screaming. I try to comfort him, but the truth is, I too am afraid.

All I could think about was ending the pain. For the sake of my family, I went looking for help. I soon learned I was not alone. There were others like me. To heal, a child needs a strong foundation. They need the mom and the dad to be strong. We need to raise our kids with good beliefs, a strong education and tenderness.

Personally, I wish to live a decent life and a safe life for my children and my husband. I know this may be out of our control, that this circle of violence may know no end. I wish that the occupation would end so we can continue our life. We are patient, and life will go on.

Praise to Allah, I'm pregnant. I pray that he continue to grant me the serenity and the power to continue my life and the will to stand up all over again. [Music]

MALAYSIA: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the film, *My Mother's Wing*, was directed by Gabo Arora and Ari Palitz in collaboration with the UN. It merely tells one story of one Palestinian family out of millions of Palestinians who have lost loved ones or suffered so immensely under decades of Israeli occupation.

Now I am pleased to invite Mr. Ardi Imseis, our first speaker for today. Mr. Imseis is an international lawyer who served over 12 years as legal advisor with UNRWA. He is currently undertaking a PhD in Cambridge University in the U.K., focusing on the UN and the question of Palestine.

Mr. Imseis, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ardi Imseis, Former Legal Advisor to UNRWA: Thank you. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to begin my presentation by thanking the Permanent Missions of Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal, Venezuela, and Angola for co-chairing this important and timely meeting, as well as the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine for inviting me to address you today.

I've been asked to discuss the legal framework relevant to the protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including with reference to the role and obligations of the United Nations Security Council. In the limited time available, I wish to make three central points.

First, given the unprecedented and multiple and humanitarian crises in the region, Palestine among them, bold and principled leadership of the Council is required now more than ever.

Second, the international laws and resolutions that would underpin any Council action in protecting civilians in occupied Palestine are known, well established, and binding on members of the Council.

Third, continued failure of the Council to act in accordance with its obligations under this law will materially contribute to the climate of impunity that continued to produce the very threats to international peace and security it is solemnly mandated to resolve under the Charter both in Palestine and beyond.

Your Excellencies, at a time when the level, scope, and impact of global armed conflict is at its worst since the Second World War, bold and principled leadership of the UN in general, and of the Security Council in particular, has become a requirement of existential proportions. The rapid spread of armed conflict in the Middle East alone, fueled in many ways by the enduring lessons of the unresolved conflict in occupied Palestine, demonstrates that the notion of total war is now alive and well as millions of innocent civilians continue to suffer without limit.

In September 2015, the President of Palestine called upon the United Nations to, "Provide international protection for the Palestinian people in accordance with international humanitarian law", pending the conclusion of a just and durable peace that ends Israel's almost 50-year occupation of his country.

Since then, according to OCHA, almost 200 Palestinians and 23 Israelis have been killed, and over 22,000 Palestinians and 250 Israelis have been injured. This is but the latest wave in violence, of wide violence, in what has now been one of the longest running conflicts on the agenda at the United Nations.

Decade after decade, Palestinian civilians have been compelled to endure the hardship that many of their fellow human beings elsewhere are now tragically facing for the first time. This includes a multitude of systematic and widespread violations of IHL directed at both them, and oftentimes humanitarian personnel mandated to ameliorate their suffering.

In today's context, therefore, the Palestinian call for international protection is vitally important. It demonstrates that without bold and principled action aimed at upholding IHL and other relevant international law, the short-term suffering of civilians today threatens to feed and produce long-term cycles of violence tomorrow.

These grave circumstances compel the international community, including through this Council, to reaffirm the importance not only of the applicability, but also of the need for effective implementation of public international law as a means of protecting Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory. Far from being a mystery, that law is known, well established, and binding on members of the Council.

In the context of occupied territory, the relevant law includes IHL, human rights law, and criminal law. For lack of time, I shall focus on the IHL, in particular the law of belligerent occupation.

The law of occupation governs the administration of enemy territory captured as a result of an international armed conflict. And if you take anything away from this presentation, take away the following two points: that in essence the law of occupation is meant to be, one, temporary, during which time the occupying power is prohibited from altering the status of the territory, including through civilian settlement of it; and two, that an occupying power is not, by virtue of its occupation, sovereign in the occupied territory. And this has been affirmed repeatedly by the Council, and in the terms regarding the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory through the threat or use of force.

Under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, and the 1907 Hague Regulations, an occupying power has the obligation to maintain public order in an occupied territory and administer it for the welfare of that territory's civilian population, defined as persons who find themselves in the hands of the occupying power and who are not its nationals.

Among the grave breeches this population is to be protected from are: willful killing, torture, willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer, willful depravation of the rights of a fair and regular trial, and the extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.

While both Israel and Palestine are party to the Fourth Geneva Convention, they are not the only ones who are bound by it. Common Article One of the Four Geneva Conventions provides that the high contracting parties, which include every member state of the United Nations, undertake to, "respect and to ensure respect for the terms of the Convention in all circumstances." Among other things, this means that states other than the occupying power are under individual legal obligations to take effective measures to ensure that Israel abides by the terms of the Convention in its treatment of the Palestinian civilian population under its control.

Among the unilateral measures the high contracted parties are required to take is the enactment of penal legislation at the domestic level and to search for and prosecute or extradite persons committing or ordering the commission of grave breeches of the Convention. See Article 146. They may also impose diplomatic or economic sanctions, including restrictions on foreign trade, investment, and aid. Among the multilateral actions the high contracting parties can take, including through the Security Council, are the appointment of a protecting power, the imposition of sanctions under the Charter, or resort to the International Criminal Court or International Court of Justice. And these are just some of the possible multilateral actions that can be taken by the high contracting parties through the Security Council.

But possible action by members of the Council does not stop there. As you are aware, since 1999 the protection of civilians in armed conflict has been a central theme in the work of the Council, beginning with the passage of Resolution 1265. But there exists Council legislation on the protection of Palestinian civilians that predates this, and which can now be put to use as the Council considers what actions may be available to it.

Resolution 605 issues in response to the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, strongly deplored Israeli practices violating the human rights of the Palestinian people, called upon Israel to abide by the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention and requested the Secretary-General to study and make, "recommendations on ways and means for ensuring the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation."

The resulting report, known as the Goulding Report, identified four different conceptions, concepts, of protection: physical protection, legal protection, general assistance, and protection by publicity.

On physical protection, the report curiously concluded that the introduction of UN military forces or observers would not be, "practicable at present", because Israel is the occupying power, and was itself, "responsible for the maintenance of law and order, and it would not, at any rate, consent to the presence of such forces in the occupying territory." Why this level of deference to the occupying power was warranted is curious, precisely because it is the occupying power that was, and continues to be, the very source of the protection crisis faced by the Palestinian people.

As the occupying power, Israel is not, by definition, sovereign in the territory, despite its responsibilities as a temporary occupant.

As members of the Council are aware, the Council may decide to take binding enforcement action under Chapter Seven of the Charter, which may include deployment of neutral forces, with the mandate to observe and/or protect civilians. Although this was alluded to in the Goulding Report, there seems to have been a general failure at that time, some 29 years ago I might add, to take that option seriously. This is something that needs to be considered in greater depth now, I would submit, particularly in light of the Security Council practice, which has since evolved.

The other forms of protection identified in the Goulding Report either continue to be maintained or have ebbed and flowed with the mandates and dwindling resources of the actors on the ground. These include the ICRC, which continues to provide a modicum of legal protection through assistance to Palestinian detainees; UNRWA, which liaises, monitors, and reports on human rights violations of Palestine refugees and other Palestinians of concern; and OCHA, which coordinates and with relevant stakeholders, and provides timely information on the humanitarian impact of the occupation on the Palestinian civilian population.

But despite the valiant efforts of these vitally important humanitarian actors, history has proved their engagement insufficient to meet the multiplicity of protection challenges that have overtaken them. The Goulding Report is of present use, therefore, precisely because it provides a glimpse into the measures previously considered, where those measures have fallen short, and how they can be augmented and expanded going into the future.

Security Council Resolution 904 of 1994 issued in response to the massacre of over 50 Palestinian civilians at prayer by an armed Israeli settler in Hebron, called upon Israel to implement measures including, "confiscation of arms with the aim of preventing illegal acts of violence by Israeli settlers.", and called for, "measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied territory, including inter alia, a temporary international foreign presence.” This resulted, as many of you know, in the creation of the TIPH, a small, unarmed, civilian observer group that continues to provide a form of protection by presence, but which is incapable of addressing the litany of protection challenges faced by the Palestinian civilian population largely due to its limited functional and geographical mandate.

In considering what actions the Council may take as it looks ahead, therefore, Resolution 605 and 904 are useful. They evidence a long-standing acknowledgment of the Council of the need for protection of the Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation, and the intention that concrete measures must be taken to this end. Thus in Resolution 605, the Council clearly decided to keep the situation, "under review." Similarly, in Resolution 904 the Council's calls for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians throughout the occupied territory remains in force. The only question is how and what Council members are prepared to do to discharge their ongoing obligations under these resolutions and in conformity with their individual and collective responsibilities under relevant international law, foremost the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Your Excellencies, it is heartening that the Council has increasingly incorporated the concept of protection of civilians into its work. Despite its stated commitments, however, its continued failure to take concrete action in accordance with its solemn legal obligations will materially contribute to the climate of impunity that prevails in Palestine and elsewhere, thereby leading to further and continued threats to international peace and security.

As the current catastrophe in Syria attests, Council dynamics have often impeded concrete action to protect civilians in armed conflict, with some members reluctant to take measures that may violate the territorial integrity of states, and others seemingly more willing to do so.

In the case of Palestine, thankfully these dynamics do not exist. Rather, the state concerned, that is Palestine, has legitimately requested the support of the international community in protecting its largely defenseless civilian population from the ravages of a foreign occupying force of nearly half a century. Far from being a temporary presence, this force has openly committed itself to continue colonizing that state, annexing its territory, usurping its natural resources, and otherwise impeding the right of its people, the only legitimate sovereign, to exercise self-determination. All of this in direct contravention of the very Charter principles that underpin the international state system, principles this Council is meant to safeguard, uphold, and protect.

And so the Council once again finds itself in the position of having to take action before greater catastrophe descends upon the people of Palestine and inevitably Israel. In the absence of a meaningful and rapid peace process aimed at an agreed just and durable settlement between the parties, the stakes are high and the hour is late. For the civilian population of occupied Palestine, no less the countless millions of other civilians increasingly subject to the brutality of armed conflict the world over, the credibility of the Council and of the United Nations as a whole, stands in the balance.

Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Thank you very much. After such an important briefing, which has just been presented to us, it is now my turn to introduce another of our eminent speakers, and I'm referring to Ms. Sarah Leah Whitson, who is Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, Middle East and North Africa Division. She oversees the work of the division in 19 countries. She has led dozens of advocacy and investigation missions throughout the region, focusing on issues of armed conflict, accountability, legal reform, migrant workers, and political rights.

Let me give the floor to Ms. Sarah. Please, you have the floor, madam.

Ms. Sarah Leah Whitson, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, Middle East and North Africa Division: Thank you, and thank you to the co-chairs of the meeting for organizing this panel on the Protection of the Palestinian Civilian Population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

As has just been noted, for over close to five decades there has been a complete failure to protect the Palestinian population, not only by Israel, the occupying power responsible for its protection, but also by the international community, and in particular the member states of the UN Security Council who have failed in their own duties to uphold and enforce international law protections for the occupied population. Such duties are magnified in light of the fact that the partition of Palestine into Israel and what are today the occupied Palestinian territories, was a product of this body. Despite numerous, 27 by last count, UN Security Council resolutions urging Israel to abide by its obligations under international law with respect to the population of the Palestinians, there has never been any meaningful action or measure taken by the Security Council to enforce its own resolutions.

The record with respect to the harm suffered by the Palestinian population under Israeli occupation is long and varied. It stems not only from the rampant violations of the laws of war in periods of conflict, most recently in Gaza over three major episodes of war and fighting in the past eight years, but in a daily unlawful assault from the Palestinian civilian population in the West Bank and East Jerusalem where not only do people face abuse of security forces and severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, but the impact of the administration of Israel's endlessly expanding settlement infrastructure, which has usurped Palestinian land, water, and natural resources; deliberately demolished thousands of Palestinian homes, forcibly displaced Palestinian civilians from their land; and subjected them to the cruelty, humiliation, and suffering of a blatant system of discrimination, segregation, repression, and exclusion merely because of their status as Palestinians Muslims and Christians.

Human Rights Watch has extensively documented Israeli violations of the laws of war during the major conflicts in Gaza in 2008, 2011 and ‘12, and 2014. During the most recent 2014 hostilities in Gaza, Israeli forces launched attacks that killed at least 1,500 civilians and wounded 11,000 people. In each of these conflicts, we have documented indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on civilians, many of which amount to war crimes including the use of heavy artillery, missiles, drone attacks, 2,000 pound bombs, and white phosphorous munitions in civilian areas; attacks on civilians carrying white flags or otherwise fleeing from their homes they were warned to leave; attacks on civilians including their homes because of their association with Hamas, though they carried no military function; the deliberate targeting of ambulances and journalists; and repeated attacks on schools and hospitals where civilians were sheltering.

In each of these conflicts, Israel destroyed thousands of homes. Of the more than 22,000 homes destroyed in 2014, some of which we just saw this in this film, virtually none has been rebuilt, displacing 108,000 people and leaving hundreds of thousands without adequate water or electricity.

And it's in each of these conflicts, Israel has destroyed Palestinian greenhouses, agricultural fields, and factories without military necessity.

Palestinian armed groups have also carried out unlawful attacks of their own in each of these conflicts, firing hundreds of indiscriminate rockets and mortars toward civilian population centers in Israel. In the most recent conflict, they summarily executed at least 25 alleged collaborators in Gaza and killed 5 civilians and wounded 36 with unlawful rocket attacks in Israel. They've also repeatedly endangered civilians by unlawfully storing weapons in and firing from civilian areas, including in three vacant ANRWA schools.

It must be restated and repeated that under international humanitarian law, the unlawful attacks of one party do not justify unlawful attacks by the other party.

Israel and co-sponsor Egypt, have continued their eight-year blockade of Gaza, which has had a devastating impact on Gaza's economy, infrastructure, and the free flow of people and goods, particularly exports, and is an unlawful and extremely cruel and degrading act of collective punishment against Gaza's civilian population.

While Israel has agreed to allow more imports of Gaza, more imports to Gaza of goods needed for reconstruction, severe restrictions on exports and travel remain.

While Egypt's expressed concern for Palestinian civilians on hosting this session is welcome, it would be far more meaningful if it would end its unlawful blockade of Gaza.

Through the most recent conflicts, Israel has banned journalists and human rights monitors from accessing Gaza, making it even more difficult to document and report on the impact of these conflicts on civilians.

We urge Egypt and Israel to allow us and other international human rights monitors access to Gaza so that we can best investigate human rights and humanitarian law abuses by all parties to the conflict.

The record for accountability in these conflicts has been dismal. Time and again Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations, as well as official investigations by the United Nations, have concluded that Israel has provided no meaningful accountability for abuses by its forces.

Following the 2014 conflict, for example, the Israeli military opened 100 probes into attacks by its forces, but to date has charged only two soldiers with looting about $600 from a Palestinian home and a third for covering it up. Similarly, there was a nearly complete absence of criminal prosecutions resulting from the self-investigations of alleged war crimes committed in Gaza during the fighting in 2008 and 2009, where only one soldier was sentenced to seven months in prison for stealing a credit card from a Palestinian, while two soldiers were sentenced to three months of a suspended sentence for using a nine-year old Palestinian boy as a human shield. A sniper, Sergeant S, was sentenced to 45 days and a six-month suspended sentence for shooting and killing a mother and daughter who were carrying white flags. This is what Israeli accountability has looked like.

Hamas also took no steps to prosecute Palestinian combatants for indiscriminate and unlawful rocket and mortar attacks at Israeli population centers in 2014, or for prior similar attacks. We also remain concerned about other dangers to civilians, including the numerous complaints of torture against Palestinian Authority security forces.

Last year, the Independent Commission for Human Rights reported at least 108 complaints. PA security forces also have violently dispersed and arbitrarily detained peaceful protestors in Ramallah. The PA has banned the distribution of two pro-Hamas weekly newspapers in the West Bank. Despite these cases, Palestinian courts did not find any West Bank security officers responsible for torture, arbitrary detention, or prior cases of unlawful deaths and custody.

Meanwhile, Israeli settlements continue to grow, now exceeding half a million Jewish Israeli settlers in 237 settlements, designed, planned, funded, and militarily protected by the government. These settlements are not just a problem because they violate the Geneva Convention as war crimes, and it's not just because they make the two-state solution, on which the Council has rested its exclusive focus, impossible. As significantly, they are a part of a system of unlawful land theft that daily denies Palestinians their rights, discriminating against them on the basis of their nationality, race, and ethnicity, depriving them of their dignity and freedom, and forcibly displacing them from their lands.

We have documented how Israel has established its two-tier harshly discriminatory policies against Palestinians living under its control in Area C and East Jerusalem, deliberately depriving them of basic necessities while providing lavish state-funded benefits, infrastructure, and amenities for Jewish settlers with no legitimate security or other justifications. Israel punishes Palestinian growth, refuses to allow Palestinians to build homes or businesses, and imposes harsh conditions on communities.

And while Israeli settlements flourish, Palestinians under Israeli control live in a time warp. Not just separate, not just unequal, but even pushed off their lands and out of their homes. By making their communities virtually uninhabitable, Israeli's policies have, frequently had the effect of forcing residents to leave their communities. According to a June 2009 survey of households in Area C, the area covering 60% of the West Bank that is under exclusive Israeli control in East Jerusalem, which Israel unilaterally annexed, some 31% of Palestinian residents have been displaced since 2000. No doubt that number is much higher six years after this survey.

Israeli policies control many aspects of the day-to-day life of Palestinians under their control. Among the discriminatory burdens imposed on Palestinians are Israeli practices of expropriating land from Palestinians for settlements and supporting infrastructure, blocking Palestinians from using roads and reaching agricultural lands, denying access to electricity and water, denying building permits for houses, schools, clinics, and infrastructure, and demolishing homes and even entire communities.

Such measures have limited the expansion of Palestinian villages and imposed severe hardships on residents, including leaving them with limited access to medical care. They have resulted in cruel and unjust outcomes, subjecting the population to military rule without any meaningful due process protections as civilians are tried by military courts, while nearby Jewish settlers enjoy the protections of Israeli civil law. A Palestinian 13-year-old child arrested for throwing stones in Hebron, for example, may face prolonged detention without charge, interrogation without a lawyer or parent present, and up to 20 years in jail under military law that applies to him, while his next-door Jewish settler 13-year old neighbor can't even be sentenced to prison under the Israeli law.

By contrast, Israeli policies promote and encourage Jewish settlements to expand, often using land and other resources that are effectively unavailable to Palestinians. The government grants numerous incentives to settlers, including funding for housing, education, and infrastructure such as special roads. These are the benefits that have led to the consistent and rapid expansion of settlements, the population of which has grown from approximately 241,000 inhabitants in 1992 to over half a million today.

Similarly, we’ve documented how settlement businesses facilitate the growth and operation of settlements. These businesses depend on and contribute to the Israeli authority's unlawful confiscation of Palestinian land and other resources. These businesses also benefit from these violations as well as the discriminatory policies that provide privileges to settlements at the expense of Palestinians, such as, again, access to land and water, government subsidies, and permits for developing land.

The quarry industry is but one example of how Israeli businesses contribute to and benefit from Israeli abuses against Palestinians. There are today 11 settlement quarries extracting natural resources from the occupied territory for the financial benefit of the occupier, in violation of international law. But since 1994, Israel has not given a single new license to a Palestinian quarry. So the industry is forced to work clandestinely, trying to escape detention and confiscation.

In our report, Occupation, Inc., we profile the quarry owners in a village near Bethlehem, Beit Fajjar. They were operating their quarries only a few days a week in an attempt to avoid confiscation. On March 21 last month, following a stabbing attack by a resident of Beit Fajjar, the Israeli army shut down the Palestinian quarries, and they remain closed. Thirty-five hundred jobs are at risk. In the meanwhile, settlement quarries are getting subsidies and other financial support.

We have called on Israel, like so many in the Security Council, to abide by its international legal obligation and withdraw all of its settlements and to end these violations of Palestinian rights. Israel's supreme court, which has jurisdiction over Israel's military activities in the West Bank, has declined to rule on the legality of transferring Israeli civilians into the West Bank, saying it is primarily political issue, ensuring there is no access to justice, no accountability inside Israel for these ongoing breeches of international law.

In recognition of the human rights responsibilities of businesses, we've also called on businesses operating, administering, trading with, or financing settlements to stop and to end their operations. There is no way to do business in the settlements without contributing to or benefiting from the inherent abuses of the settlement regime against the Palestinian population. And that's why the only way for businesses to comply with their own human rights responsibilities is to stop working with and in Israeli settlements. We welcome HeidelbergCement's decision today to seek an alternative to a quarry that enriches settlements.

Member states should ensure that any import of settlement goods into their territory is consistent with their duty under international law not to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territories. This includes prohibiting such goods from being labeled as made in Israel, excluding them from preferential tariff treatment for Israeli products, and refraining from recognizing any certification, such as organic, of settlement goods by Israeli government authorities.

The best hope for accountability today comes as a result of Palestinian's ratification of the Rome Statute and its accession to the International Criminal Court. Given strong evidence that serious crimes have been committed in and from Palestine since 2014, including Palestinian armed groups, rocket attacks, and new population transfers into occupied territories, as well as the pervasive climate of impunity, the International Criminal Court prosecutor should formally investigate the matter consistent with the Rome Statute.

It must be noted that the American, British, and Canadian response to this positive development has been shameful. While they champion the court's promise of justice in Libya, Sudan, and Syria, they have opposed Palestine joining the court, including U.S. Ambassador Power, who has otherwise promoted the court as an important vehicle for justice. Most recently, Ambassador Power asked, why is it that the people of Uganda, Darfur, Libya, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Kenya deserve international impartial justice, but the Syrian people do not? And so, I also ask Ambassador Power, why don't victims of war crimes in Palestine and Israel also deserve international impartial justice?

The U.S. and others have tried to pressure Palestine to end its pursuit of accountability in the ICC for a resumption of an elusive peace process and a settlement freeze, as if justice were a chip to be bargained on the political gambling table. This kind of selective approach to accountability does no favor to Israeli's or Palestinians who continue to be victimized by war crimes. It also undermines the power and legitimacy of international justice around the world, emboldening critics who argue that such justice is reserved only for weak nations without powerful Western allies.

We are now almost 50 years into military occupation, straining the legitimacy and credibility of the application of the Geneva Convention's occupation laws, much less the enforcement of civilian protection that the Convention mandates. As was just noted, these laws were meant for temporary occupations, and we cannot forever until this elusive peace process, deny Palestinians their civil and political rights, including voting rights in the government that controls their lives, Israel. We will increasingly see the legal and political struggle push in that direction. In the meanwhile, the urgent and desperate need, which is readily deliverable, for civilian protection lies in the hands of the international community.

Thank you.

Moderator: I thank Ms. Sarah Leah for her briefing, for the remarks clear. Let me now turn to Mr. Michael Sfard, who is the head of Yesh Din's legal team. He's also a lawyer, specializing in international human rights law, and the laws of war with a special emphasis of the law of belligerent occupation. He is the legal advisor to several Israeli human rights organizations and peace groups. Please?

Mr. Michael Sfard, Yesh Din [Israeli-based Palestinian-centered NGO]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the co-sponsors for inviting us to this important meeting. My name is Michael Sfard. I'm an Israeli lawyer. I've been litigating cases in the Israeli High Court of Justice for the last two decades on behalf of Israeli human rights organizations, peace groups, Palestinian communities, and Israeli and Palestinian activists.

I'm here representing an Israeli human rights non-governmental organization, Yesh Din, that focuses on strengthening the rule of law as a means to protect the human rights of civilians under occupation.

Yesh Din has been representing for the last 11 years Palestinian residents of the West Bank in pursuit of protection against and remedy for abuse to property, body, and life.

During those years, we have assembled a massive database that includes more than 1,300 cases of alleged abuses by Israeli civilians against Palestinian civilians, and more than 550 cases of alleged abuse by members of the Israel armed forces. This extensive database, and our intimate acquaintance with the law enforcement agencies in the region and the government of Israel's policies in the West Bank, allow us a unique understanding of the reality on the ground, which I would like to share with the members of the Council.

I am sure I don't have to tell the members of the Council that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had, and still has, a dreadful effect on civilians on both sides. Palestinian civilians are victims of ongoing and escalating assaults by radical Israeli settlers, who systematically attack their communities, harm their crops, and use extreme violence against them, all in an effort to gain more domination over their lands, dispossess, and finally displace them. Violent settlers terrorize the Palestinian rural community and cause much pain and suffering. Palestinians are also victims—Palestinian civilians are also victims of mass abuse of force by Israeli security forces, which sadly is frequently not compatible with international law. Israeli civilians are being targeted by Palestinian armed groups, who randomly select their civilian victims as a method of struggle, and also by lone attackers who look for Israelis to stab and kill or wound them. These phenomena terrorize the Israeli society and cause much pain and suffering.

Yesh Din condemns vigorously and unequivocally all insults to human rights, all violations of international law, and all attacks on civilians, whoever the perpetrators are and whatever the identity of the victim is. It maintains that the government of Israel has a duty to provide protection to all civilians under its control, that the government of Palestine has responsibility to the extent it has control over offenders, and that the Security Council has a responsibility to constantly remind both governments of their obligations and insist that they uphold them.

However, while Israel maintains a functioning and largely effective security apparatus that is meant to protect Israeli civilians and investigate and bring to justice those who wage attacks against them, Yesh Din's multi-year research and study reveal that Israeli agencies responsible for the protection of Palestinian civilians is failing colossally.

Since the conflict is in its heart a territorial conflict in the West Bank between settlers and Palestinian civilians, and since the Israeli settlement enterprise is meant to colonize the Palestinian lands, settler violence, which may seem in first glance anarchic and unguided, actually has a strategic aim: dispossessing Palestinians from their lands and allowing room for more Israeli settlement growth.

But settling an occupied territory by the civilians of the occupying power is not prohibited in international law for nothing. It is meant to prevent the exact grave outcomes, which are manifested in the occupied Palestinian territories; a coercive demographic change in the composition of the population in the occupied territory, the allocation of the wealth and natural resources of the occupied territory to the nationals of the colonizing power on the expense of the local population, and the creation of two classes of residents: one deprived of rights and powerless, and one privileged, powerful, and well connected.

But the reality is even worse than that. Every Israeli settlement functions as the epicenter of fields of human rights abuses of the neighboring Palestinian communities. Those communities suffer from restriction on their movement, from damage to their livelihood, from assignment of almost every local natural resource to the settlers, in many cases from physical harassment and abuse, and in all cases from gradual loss of their property and lands. Loss of land is caused by a sect of official policies of confiscation and allocation of lands to the settlement movement, and unofficial violence by Israel civilians, by settlers, aimed to deter farmers from cultivating their lands.

If any of you would come with me to Palestine and visit a Palestinian village and ask the villagers in that village, what are the lines of domination of the nearby settlement? This farmer would not direct you to their build-up area of the nearby settlement, neither to the ring growth around it or the fence, if there is one around it. It will direct you to a tree or a rock or a valley, and will say, if I cross that valley, I will be assaulted. I will be in danger.

The unseen lines of domination are the lines of violence that keep on moving. Today's plot of land that is the place of friction will be taken over and tomorrow the next plot of land would be the new area of friction. And so the Palestinian communities are shoved and pushed into their residential areas.

Yesh Din has found that Israeli law enforcement agencies responsible to discontinue this practice suffer from systematic and institutional failures, which in turn allow this process of land grab through violence to flourish. These institutions lack the resources, the political backing, and also they cannot operate under a wrong spirit of their commander, which does not really—and I mean the Israeli leadership, political leadership, that does not really have in mind enhancing law enforcement mechanisms for and protection of Palestinian civilians.

The bleak result of all of this are the figures that I have that are the multi-year study of Yesh Din. 91.5% of complaints by—filed by Palestinian civilians into allegedly ideologically motivated crimes committed by Israeli civilians against Palestinian civilians investigated by the Israeli police have been closed with no results between 2005 and 2016. 91.5%.

We have looked into those cases because we represent the victims, and we have standing. Eighty-five of the investigation files that have been closed have been closed due to investigation failures. And the investigation failures range between failure to carry very basic investigative action to slowness of action or lack of resources or manpower. Only in 7.3% of the complaints filed by Palestinian civilians against, alleging that Israeli civilians have assaulted them, result in charges being brought against the alleged offenders. But only a third of trials against Israeli, alleged Israeli offenders, result with either full or even partial conviction.

The bottom line is staggering. A Palestinian civilian who will overcome the natural distrust to seek protection from Israeli law enforcement agencies and will file a complaint against—and file a complaint alleging that an Israeli settler has damaged his property or assaulted him, has less than 2% chance that his assailant will be convicted. Yesh Din's recent data shows an increase, a very alarming increase, in attacks carried out by Israeli civilians against Palestinians in residential areas of the West Bank villages.

Since August of 2014, the number of incidents that we have documented that have been taking place in residential areas rather than remote farmlands has been doubled. This reflects a growing boldness on the part of the perpetrators, who know they will not be penalized.

Lack of law enforcement on Israeli citizens who harm Palestinians and their property sends perpetrators a clear message that their action will be tolerated and they will be immune from punishment. This is a clear violation of Israel's obligation as an occupying power under both international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Israel is failing to provide adequate protection both in the form of prevention and in the form of post-factor judicial remedy. But this is the lesser grave violation.

The government of Israel's settlement policy has seen a dramatic change in recent years, and especially in recent months. This change provides a significant tailwind to settler violence given its aim of gaining more and more control over as much land as possible. It gave a tailwind to the process of dispossession through violence.

Yesh Din and other Israeli NGOs active in the struggle against settlement expansion have experienced this sea of change through court proceedings in the Israeli High Court of Justice, and through the official state positions presented in these proceedings regarding the fate of what is termed as unauthorized settlements, settlements that have been created without the permission or the official permission of the government of Israel. The government of Israel has maintained for years, both in international arenas and in the Israeli court, that unauthorized settlements that are called internal Israeli outposts, that most of them are either fully or partially located on grabbed Palestinian private land, are to be removed. That was the official position of the State of Israel for many years.

In recent years, it's policy has made a complete U-turn. Out of 100 outposts, these are settlements that have not received the official authorization of the government of Israel, in recent months, recent years and most significantly in recent months, 32 of 100 have been either retroactively authorized or are in the process of being authorized. Nineteen new settlements, official settlements, we have and 13 planned. This new process is creating de facto and sometimes new independent settlements. Each such new settlement is a new center for potential massive growth and another source for abuse of Palestinian livelihood, freedom, and property. All authorizations of such, all retroactive authorizations of such outposts violate international law and also international agreement to which Israel is party to, in which Israel has committed itself to evacuate and demolish those outposts: The Oslo Accords, Annapolis Conference, Joint Understanding, The Roadmap for Peace.

A second dramatic shift in the state legal position relates to the status of the West Bank. Gradually the government of Israel shifts towards a denial of the occupied status of the land. We also record a growing tendency to deny the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the military regime in the West Bank, which up to date was in practice accepted as a governing norm, even if in international forums Israel is questioned its applicability. These policy changes pose an immense new danger to the rights of Palestinian communities. They will allow an unprecedented expansion of the settlement enterprise and erode what is left of international humanitarian law protections Israel concedes that Palestinians do have.

Excellencies, I would like to end with a personal note. I'm an Israeli national. I was born in Israel, I was raised in Israel, I went to law school in Israel, I raise my children in Israel. It is not easy for me, nor to the organization that I represent, to stand before you and list my country's violations of international law. But we are concerned about the future of our country, and we want the best for the Israeli society. And being concerned for the future of Israel entails, as the UN Secretary-General aptly indicated in his 2015 Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, to systematically remind parties to conflict of their obligations under international law. And if I may add, to insist they live up not only to their international legal obligations, but also to the values upon which they were founded.

This Council is entrusted with the sacred task of maintaining peace and security. There are missions here that represent states who are allies of the State of Israel and share values with its people. The friendly thing to do is to keep reminding its government that the West Bank is occupied, and that the occupation must end; that millions of people with suspended civil rights must be allowed to exercise their natural rights; that the Geneva Convention applies to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem; that settlements are illegal and all settlement activity must stop; that Israel is the occupying power, the occupying power has a legal obligation to prevent assaults on Palestinians, bring attackers to justice, and provide protection to Palestinian properties.

Members of the Council, Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live together. Palestinians would not evaporate into thin air. Israelis would not disappear. Adherence to international law is a main ingredient in a recipe for peace.

Thank you.

Senegal: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, so it falls to the Senegalese delegation, co-sponsor of this meeting to continue our exchanges by giving the floor to the members of the Council who wish to speak to this.

Before I do this, however, I would like to recall that since the Venezuelan presidency back in the month of February, the question of what the Council could and should do concerning Palestine, something which that led to a lot of heated discussion. The ambassadors and I had pondered the two main questions, not the only questions, but the main questions, namely those of the protection to be given to Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation, and the question of the settlement policy and the violence associated with it.

And I believe that this is all part and parcel of the meeting which we have here today, and under Angolan presidency this exercise and consideration continued. And here we find ourselves today in an Arria-formula format, hopeful that the exchanges of these meeting will enable the Security Council to act more forcefully than it has done so this far.

Resolution 605, 904, the compendium which the Secretary-General of the United Nations has circulated in October 2015 on 18 cases of administration by the League of Nations and the United Nations, and the study carried out by the legal advisor of the United Nations on the issue of international protection to be given to the Palestinian population are all documents, all proposals which lead us to believe that there are elements, the necessary elements to act on there, action by the Secretary-General, by Security Council rather, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations itself.

I am going to read out the list of speakers now as I have it before me. I have on my list the Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives of France, Russia, Venezuela, Spain, Uruguay, New Zealand, and Ukraine. I also saw the name of Angolan colleague. I don't know whether you wish to take the floor again or not. No? Very well. Thank you for that. And they will then be followed by the Permanent Representatives of Japan, the United States, China, and the United Kingdom.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the list of speakers and without any further ado, I will hand the floor to the Permanent Representative of France. François, you have the floor.

France: Thank you. Thank you so much. I'd like to start by thanking in a most warm and heartfelt way my Egyptian, Senegalese, Angolan, Malaysian, and Venezuelan colleagues for having undertaken the initiative of convening this very important meeting, meeting which takes the Arria format meeting on the Protection of Palestinian Civilian Population. I'd also like to thank all of the briefers for their very interesting presentations. They were strong, enlightening, moving, and all of us prompt us to greater action.

The briefings we have just heard demonstrate the deterioration of the situation on the ground and the need to guarantee better protection of the Palestinian population in occupied territories. There is no doubt that arbitrary detentions, punitive destruction of houses, the transfer of Palestinian detainees to Israeli territory, the building of the wall of separation, the confiscation of humanitarian structures in the C Zone are all have continuing. These violations of international humanitarian law must of course be condemned, and all parties including non-state actors must comply with the obligations incumbent upon them under international law, and especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to the occupied territories by Israel in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip as was recalled by the ICJ in its opinion dated 2004 on the war.

More generally speaking, we remind you that it is up to the occupying power to administer the Palestinian occupied Palestinian territories by meeting the needs of the civilian population. France, therefore, cannot but underscore its concern faced with the humanitarian situation, which remains disastrous in Gaza, but also the disastrous situation in a number of areas in the West Bank. France has unceasingly denounced the deterioration of the security situation, which has a growing impact on the civilian population, Palestinian civilian population.

Since October 1, 2015, acts of violence have led to the deaths of close to 200 Palestinians, most of them perpetrators of attacks, and close to 5,000 Palestinians were injured.

The Israeli civilian population, of course, is also paying a heavy price as the victims of indiscriminate attacks threatened by Hamas' rocket arsenal. Four hundred—over 400 Israeli civilians have been killed in—have been injured and 28 killed since October 2015. During the first few months of 2016, the number of destructions or confiscation of humanitarian structures in the C Zone has already surpassed the total number of demolitions and confiscations, which were recorded during the whole of 2015.

Finally, the recent upsurge of tension in Gaza presents the risk of an escalation which the civilian population, as always, will be the first to pay the price for. In this context, France quite unequivocally condemns all forms of violence, especially against civilians. What is urgent here is to break the spiral of hate, to reaffirm the strongest possible way to the objective of a two-state solution, and to create, finally, a political horizon, political momentum in that direction.

Faced with a deterioration situation, France indeed believes, and we had believed this for a while, that the status quo is one which is untenable. The status quo in reality is a regression, which every day diminishes the hopes, yearnings of the Palestine people and the security of the Israeli people. The effective protection of the Palestinian population, therefore, involves the re-creation of a political, credible political horizon, on which requires collective organization to save a two-state solution. It's the only possible way to put an end to the ongoing deterioration of the situation since last fall.

As was recalled by a number of speakers, the Security Council of the United Nations will have a key role to play here when the time is right. For now, with the same objective, France will organize a ministerial meeting on May 30. This ministerial meeting, whose modalities have been announced publicly by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, will enable us to—will allow us, rather, to bring together the main partners to recreate the conditions for constructive dialogue between the parties. Our initiative is aimed, and I repeat this, neither at competing with the United Nations or the Quartet, nor to substitute itself for the parties who bear the primary responsibility for negotiating a lasting peace.

This meeting will have two main objectives: on the one hand we have the political support, unambiguous political support for the two-state solution; and on the other to define as precisely as is possible the instruments which guarantee and prompt us to make progress in this direction. We'll be able to lay the foundations for the renewed momentum towards an international conference which France proposes to act during this—to organize during the second half of this year, and to help the parties to recreate conditions for a resumption of negotiations with the support of the international community. It is in this way, with the active support of the international community, that we will be in a position to provide a credible horizon and path for the lasting improvement of the situation of the civilian population of Palestine by meeting their legitimate aspirations for a state.

Thank you.

Moderator: I'd like to thank the Permanent Representative of France. And now I will give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation.

Russia: Co-Chairs, Co-Presidents, we would like to thank the delegations of Angola, Egypt, Venezuela, Senegal, and Malaysia for having organized today's meeting. We'd like to congratulate the government and people of Palestine with having carried out such an important event. We're grateful to the briefers for their very meticulous statements. We're extremely concerned by the continuing deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

The upsurge of yet another spiral of violence in the Palestine territories and Israel threatens to permanently bury any prospects for the peace prospects today. There is less and less talk about the need for a re-launch of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, which are at a standstill since April 2014, and the situation continues to deteriorate.

The wave of violence goes on unabated since October 2015. The victims of the clashes now have surpassed over 200 Palestinians and 30 Israelis, and the Israeli government continues its policy of facts on the ground, policy of building settlements, of land confiscation, and demolishing of homes, and this threatens of course a two-state solution.

Against this backdrop, what stands out as the most important fact is the protection of the civilian population, one of the key elements for the settlement of armed conflicts and maintenance of international peace and security as a whole. In this context, we note what was prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and circulated in October of last year at the Security Council. I'm referring to the Review of International Practice for the Protection of the Civilian Population. We believe that its historic examples will help us to, together, elaborate the optimal form for assisting the Palestinian population.

And by the way, it certainly needs its assistance. What is especially alarming is the situation of children's rights. In the Secretary-General's recent report on children in armed conflicts there is information on the deterioration of the situation of children in the zone of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2015. It refers inter alia to the fact that 30 Palestinians were children; at least 1,735 were injured, mostly as a result of military operations of the IDF.

Now schools and kindergartens in the Palestinian territories are being destroyed. Just in 2015, according to the United Nations, 262 schools and 274 kindergartens were destroyed, including all UN schools.

The Palestinian branch of the Red Cross refers to 131 medical personnel and practitioners working in personnel, as well as a refusal to a court access to doctors to the sick and injured. Seventy such cases have been recorded.

We're also concerned by the growth in number of arrested and detained in Israeli prisons—I'm referring to Palestinian children, 136 of them under the age of 11 years. This is a shocking figure.

Now against this backdrop, what is pressing is the issue of ensuring accountability for the violations against children and other groups of the civilian population. However, according to information provided by the Secretariat, an atmosphere of impunity for crimes committed against the Palestinians prevails. Thus, out of 190 cases which were initiated following accusations of violations of international humanitarian law in 2014, only three Israeli soldiers were found guilty. Investigations into the killing of four children on a Gaza beach in 2014 were closed.

We're convinced that normalizing a situation will only be possible by renewed negotiations track and finding agreements on and final status of. Now what is needed are substantive measures in keeping with existing Israeli-Palestinian agreements, which would strengthen the political and economic institutions of Palestine, mindful, of course, of the legitimate concerns of Israel in the security field.

Now at an international level, we stand ready to consider any initiatives if they are to yield real added value.

I thank you, Co-Presidents.

Moderator: I'd like to thank the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, and I'm now going to give the floor to the Representative—Permanent Representative, in fact, of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela. Ambassador, you have the floor in your national capacity.

Venezuela: Thank you. Before I go any further, I wish to thank all the members of the Security Council in attendance today. All the ambassadors, diplomats, and the Representative of the State of Palestine, of course which is the most interested party in this question, and to all the speakers that we've heard from today.

Now I think that these presentations that we've have heard today have afforded us a broad vision of the problem represented by protecting Palestinian population in the occupied territories. We have had a legal review, as well as a human rights review of the situation, and the representative of Yesh Din is deserving of our congratulations for his bravery. And as he said, it's a very difficult situation. This is one of absolute impunity with these strings of violations of the civil rights of the population.

Venezuela's position is well known and we have always reiterated our clear support for the self-determination independence of the people of the State of Palestine. And we have always clearly and unequivocally condemned the occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory, and at the process of settlement that is taking place before the eyes of the Security Council while we stand by.

And all depositories, and we have always spoken of this, have been asking why has the Security Council not been able to abide by its own resolution? We are members of the Security Council, elected members, and we will be here probably many years before Venezuela is here again because we're always having to break our cycle. But what we want to do is shoulder responsibility to say what we can and know. We are not a permanent member. We do not have any interest other than to contribute towards achieving international peace and security.

And let me say this clearly. The issue of Palestine has come to paralysis in the Security Council, and no one has any doubt whatsoever of the absolute illegality of the Israel action. The only thing that we have been doing in all our consultations, whether closed or open, is to continue to add figures in a situation that is absolutely illegal and violates the entire international United Nations machinery: the murders that have been ongoing; the ongoing violence against civilians, whether women, men, or children; the ongoing violation of all possible human rights. And not just murders, but also the right to life or the right to education; the right to services; discrimination that the Palestinians are subject to; and the terrible impunity with which Israel acts are all well known to everyone.

It is our view that the Security Council has every responsibility to bear with respect to this issue for the past 50 years. It is the clear fiasco that we have seen in the Security Council which has not been able to come up with a solution that is in keeping with international law and it does not abide by, nor does it even seek to abide by its own resolutions. There are more than seven resolutions, as mentioned by the representative of Human Rights Watch. And the entire community is wondering why this continues to be the case.

Let me say that our experience when we took the presidency of the Security Council in February was to try to raise these issues, and we tried this on five occasions in the Council. We wanted to see if we could make use of the practice that there is no rule against coming up with five points of the agenda to bring up this issue. And it was the first time that, in the Security Council, that we took up the humanitarian issue of Palestine in the Security Council. I think it was under Uruguay. But let me say to you, ladies and gentlemen, there is no way for the Security Council to even come up with press elements or a statement or a declaration or a resolution on the Palestinian question because this has been an issue that has always been stagnant and blocked by the United States and a few other permanent members.

Let me say this clearly. What we have here is a terrible injustice being perpetrated against the people of Palestine. What we have is a situation that is in breach of the entire global machinery and we have double standards in this mission.

Unfortunately, in the Middle East, this is a region that has been beset by many conflicts and some member states, who are permanent members of the Security Council based on their national interests, are immediately resolute in terms of punishing or invading. But when it comes to Palestine, there is a double standard, and this is a grave injustice what is happening when we look at the failure by the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities.

There are so many elements that I could raise here, but what I did want to do is draw everyone's attention to this situation facing the children of Palestine. It is inconceivable for us for these children to be subject to military trials, court martials, and be incarcerated in military prisons in Israel and have their lives stymied and blighted, and this is unprecedented.

But yes, there is a precedent. During the most totalitarian and fascist regimes during the war there were precedents. But what I want us to do is ask ourselves this question, and do so among ourselves as members of the Council: what does Israel plan to do with the Palestinians? Will they be disappeared? Does Israel seek probably to wage a final solution sort of solution as was perpetrated against the Jews?

There is a reason why we have international standards. There's a reason why we have the United Nations. So we are making a public call, as we have done in private, for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities. And we don't have to wait for the right time. One never knows when is the right time. I think the right time is now because 50 years have gone by already. The time is now. We can't continue to call on Israelis and the people of Palestine to suffer at the hands of an occupying territory who continues to settle their territory, demolish their homes, grab their lands, imprison their children, and murder their women and children. The time is now. We have no need to wait any longer and we, therefore, will support all the proposals for diplomatic efforts and the work of the Quartet, and the possible international conference that was announced by France. We enthusiastically support all these initiatives, but we do have to do something now. Now.

One simple step could be to come up with a resolution on the Israeli illegal settlements. We would all agree that it is illegal, and we all agree that it would be an excellent signal to be sent by the Security Council to say that we are taking action on this issue. If there are no countries blocking it, then they must shoulder their responsibilities so that we all share this responsibility because otherwise it would be a crime against the people the Palestine. We must continue to work towards a resolution to deal with this issue of settlements, and we could move towards some vital actions that as the President of the Palestinian Authority has asked for. There are many things that this Security Council could do. The Council also has to do something.

And as we heard some colleagues say, we understand that the status quo is untenable. As far as we are concerned, this has been the status quo—the status quo has been untenable for quite some time now, but at least we're happy to hear it said now. But we are seeing that the possibly of the two-state solution evaporating before our very eyes. And as long as Israel continues to illegally settle Palestinian territory and continues to impose blockades, such as the blockade against Gaza, which is criminal, well, we will be looking to—we are faced with the possibility that this two-state solution will evaporate before our very eyes.

And the people of Palestine also have all the legal rights to which they're entitled under our Charter and they have every right to defend their lives and future. And, therefore, this Security Council should ensure that this does not break out into further violence, as we have said. And the level of violence could be a strategy used by the occupying power to provoke the Palestinians because whenever there is a Palestinian action, there's a disproportionate reaction from Israel against the Palestinians and they will continue to reinforce their position.

And we think that this is a very important region—important meeting rather. This can't be done in an official Security Council meeting. We have had to have an informal meeting. And I'm happy to see this huge turnout and the many ambassadors who have afforded us the possibility of discussing this issue here in this meeting and to say things clearly and to state clearly why it is unbelievable how this question has not been resolved because of the blockade imposed by some members of the Security Council.

Thank you.

Moderator: I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Spain, having thanked the Permanent Representative of Venezuela. Román, please.

Spain: Any many thanks to the five co-chairs, Egypt, Angola, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela, for organizing this successful Arria-formula meeting. And many thanks also to the three panelists who gave us splendid, moving, and courageous presentations.

The situation in the occupied territories is one of grave concern to us. And today we have been able to see it in virtual reality. All speakers who have taken the floor before me have said it very clearly. The status quo in untenable. The developments in the situation in the oPt is particularly alarming with respect both to the implementation and respect for international humanitarian law, as well as the future viability of the two-state solution.

Now the worst possible scenario would be that we would lose our way towards that two-state solution. The expansion of settlements, the disposition of—expropriation of lands and the displacement of populations, as well as the demolitions, especially punitive demolitions that have been carried out by way of collective punishments, are all illegal acts from international law perspective and adversely affect the commitment towards a final solution.

We have also said that there is disproportionate use of force by the security forces and in cases where it occurs, particularly when the victims are minors.

But terrorism is also the same case. We have said on many occasions, and we repeat at this time, there is never justification for terrorism. And although we have been talking about civilians in the occupied territories, we must also condemn attacks against Israeli citizens because they are also unjustifiable. A bomb is as terrorist an act as a stab against—in the civilian’s chest. We also have to condemn the incitement to violence and this is something that is of concern to us.

Now turning to the possibilities of the Security Council taking action, we would like—we believe that the Security Council has a very important role and responsibility to bear in this Palestinian question, including with respect to protecting civilians. But we also believe that the Security Council must look into other options at its disposal and do so carefully before taking any decision whatsoever.

Spain is open to studying any specific formula or proposal to that may be proposed, but let us not lose sight of the fact that in practice we can't use a formula that does not gather consensus from all parties. Indeed, the Hebron observation mission was deployed based on Resolution 904, as Adri Imseis pointed out to us just now, but with the agreement of the parties.

And in closing, and this is something that we have said on many other occasions, the security measures, if they are not supported by other measures to do away with incitement to hatred among communities, will not be enough to prevent violence. And it is for this reason that we must continue to underscore the very high importance of coming up with a new horizon to hope. And we resolutely support France in its efforts to seek to organize an international conference and we believe that this would be the right way forward.

We would like to thank the delegation of France for the information and the additional details that we heard from them today. We must work in a concerted and coordinated fashion at all initiatives so that we can all consistently converge towards the same objective. We think that this will help the parties to overcome the current situation.

If you'll allow me to ask one single question because the other two questions have already been answered by the panelists. But my question probably should be addressed to Sarah Leah, who went into great detail on the issue of settlements. Now the growth in the pace of demolitions of Palestinian structures in recent months is of particular concern to us as well. And on many occasions those demolitions, as you've said, had been legally justified using the argument that these are buildings that were built without permits. But what is less clear to us is how easy—let me repeat, how easily can one secure such a permit? And my question is, do we have any statistics on the number of permits that have been applied for and that have been declined or rejected?

Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: I thank the Permanent Representative of Spain for that statement. And I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative, Uruguay. You have the floor, Mr. Ambassador.

Uruguay: Thank you very much, the Co-Chair, and many thanks to the delegations of Angola, Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela, for convening this meeting.

It's true that we have very little experience in Arria-formula meetings because we haven't been in the Security Council for too long, but to see a room almost full, it shows a clear interest of membership in the question that is before us today.

I also thank these panelists for their presentations, especially Mr. Sfard and Ms. Whitson. And as was pointed out, not only were they informative and well documented, but there was a depth of human content and proof of their courage.

Mr. Co-Chair, almost 70 years ago the General Assembly adopted a resolution that spoke of the possible creation of a Jewish and an Arab state, and it was thought that this would help Israel and Palestine to live in peace together with safe borders. Uruguay continues to firmly support the two-state solution, with borders recognized, in a framework of cooperation free from any threat to peace, including acts of terrorism.

And with this conviction, we early recognized the State of Israel. And later on when we realized that this could no longer be delayed, we recognized the State of Palestine. And we now have embassies in Israel and Palestine, and both of them have embassies in Uruguay as well.

It is our view that the international community should step up its efforts to support this process, and we wish to encourage the parties to continue bilateral—or rather resume bilateral talks to come up with a just and lasting pace in accordance with international law and that is in keeping with their individual interests. We think that this is an imperative for this organization and indeed for this Council.

Given the deep ties of friendship that we have with Palestine and Israel, Uruguay will continue to play a balanced and constructive role in this process, and it will support any action or initiative that will help bring an end to the hostilities and bring about an environment that is conducive to peace and for each party to achieve their own interests. And we also, in this regard, welcome France's initiative and we will support it as best we can and seek to collaborate with them.

But at the same time, Co-Chair, the parties must refrain from adopting unilateral decisions that will stop the prospects of dialogue. IHL and international human rights law and obligations to protect civilians, as well as the immediate cessation of construction in occupied territories and confiscation of property by Israel, as pointed out in various Security Council resolutions, are serious obstacles to achieving peace in the region. And it is key, therefore, that we try to break the impasse and build confidence.

It is also our great concern, Mr. Co-Chair, this situation of violence and the terrorist acts that have taken place, we think that international cooperation is important to ensure that we have the continued economic development of the Palestinian people. We want to see institutions built there to ensure that the viability of the Palestinian State is maintained and it has affirmed its rights to be a full-fledged state.

The most recent military conflict in the Gaza Strip, which left thousands dead and many buildings destroyed, and the humanitarian catastrophe that resulted from it, we have noted that this has its root in the frustration of the population and the lack of hope for their future.

About just over 10 years ago, the 2005 Global Summit recognized the principle of the responsibility to protect. And on numerous occasions this commitment has been mentioned when we deal with situations of grave humanitarian impact in various scenarios around the world. But it would seem to me that this concept of the responsibility to protect does not extend to the Palestinian people.

Mr. Co-Chair, as the Secretary-General said during the recent open debates on the Middle East, we must remember the full effect of Resolution 242 of the Security Council which calls for a withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces from the occupied territories since 1967. And it calls for the respect and recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity and independence of each state in the region and their right to live in peace with secure borders, sheltered from peace, and able to bring about lasting peace in the Middle East.

Thank you, sir.

Moderator: I thank the Permanent Representative of Uruguay, and I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of New Zealand. You have the floor, sir.

New Zealand: Thank you very much. Let me begin by saluting my fellow E10 members, Egypt, Angola, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela, for their initiative in convening today's meeting. I think it's been extremely useful and interesting.

As my foreign minister’s made clear in his statement at last month's Security Council open debate on the Middle East, New Zealand is very concerned that the Security Council has not passed a single resolution on the Israel-Palestine conflict in over seven years, despite the steady deterioration of the situation on the ground and the increasingly real prospect that the Council will soon be a witness to the demise of the two-state solution as settlements and demolitions occur in the occupied Palestinian territory.

New Zealand is also a strong supporter of the UN's work on the protection of civilians. Discussion about that subject, like the prevention of conflict, is most valuable when it focuses on real-life situations affecting real people, and that has been a good part of today's briefings, and I salute briefers.

Unfortunately, I was not able to be present for all the briefing, but I was able to hear Mr. Sfard, and as a fellow international lawyer I want to congratulate you on your analysis, which I fully agree with, and commend you on your courage. I'd also just like to lay the observation that it is not the anti-Israel to recognize that the steps, the issues that you have identified are serious and need to be addressed. Of note, very similar statements are regularly recorded in the New York Times by prominent Israeli fence establishment personnel and others, as they lament the passage of the two-state solution if we do not act soon.

New Zealand is very firm in its belief that discussions on the protection of civilians in any conflict situation must be balanced. If we condemn without reservation, the ongoing violence and the prevention of rights and land visited upon constantly as civilians. Equally, we condemn without reservation the terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, the rocket attacks from Gaza and the random violence against Israeli individuals that has been occurring over the past month. We must find a way to end this violence so that both communities can live in peace.

It is precisely because of our desire to see an end to the impact of this long-running conflict on Palestinian and Israeli civilians alike that New Zealand has been very active and outspoken about the need for the Security Council to exercise its responsibilities and to take decisions that will help bring Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table.

We don't share entirely the pessimism of our Venezuelan colleague. We do believe it is still possible for this Council to take action. We believe that collective Council action reaffirming the two-state solution and setting a path towards resumption of the peace process is the single most important thing that we as a council can do to protect civilians on both sides. And New Zealand will continue to press for such action.

Looking ahead, we think it is important in the context of steps to build a sustained confidence on both sides that the parties, the Quartet and other stakeholders, including the Council are open to the idea that protection mechanisms may be useful elements that can ultimately help carry forward a negotiating process. When the Council eventually gauges substantively as it must on the parameters for negotiations, we believe such ideas should find a place in the resultive resolution.

Longer term, we also need to be open to the idea that the Council should be willing at the right time to authorize the deployment of observers, monitors or peacekeepers to reinforce the agreements that the parties reach and help ensure the sustained protection of civilians on both sides.

In the mean time, we need to do more thinking to ensure that we have a shared understanding about what a protection mechanism could look like, and what model would be acceptable to all the parties.

While the Secretary-General's compendium gives us examples of past practice, it does not recommend options for the occupied Palestinian territories going forward. We also need to make sure that we're all pulling in the same direction to preserve the two-state solution, to urge the parties to stop violence and cease inflammatory rhetoric and actions, and to get the parties back to the negotiations.

I thank you.

Moderator: I'd like to thank the Permanent Representative of New Zealand, and I'm going to give the floor to Representative of Ukraine.

Ukraine: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. Ukraine welcomes the initiative of Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela to hold this Arria formula meeting. I think that the presence of so many fellow delegates today is the best proof of the importance of this matter. I'm also thankful to the briefings which give us a lot of thoughts and proof the seriousness of the situation.

Ukraine consistently support the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine coexisting in decent security. Unfortunately, we are currently observing deterioration of the situation in West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Expansion of control over Area C and settlement activity may undermine the efforts of the international community to achieve a tangible progress in the peace process and jeopardize the viability of a two-state solution.

This is a trend that needs to be reversed. Since last autumn, we have witnessed the dangerous trend of rising violence and loss of human life, especially in and around Jerusalem and Hebron. The lack of political dialogue is an extremely unpredictable and explosive situation. In this regard, Ukraine calls on both sides to take necessary steps to prevent any further deterioration of the situation. Everybody must play their part in implementing measures that could have a positive impact on the ground and in bringing the two sides back to a path towards lasting and just peace. It is absolutely essential that all those involved in the efforts to move the negotiating process forward are constantly reminded about those who matter in this political process and who are ultimately to benefit from its success. People living in this part of the world have been through too much suffering and it is very frustrating to see this trend continuing without any sign of abating.

We as international community must do our utmost to break this vicious circle. In this light, we believe that the French initiative to convene an international conference aimed at recreating the momentum for the resumption of talks deserve the most serious consideration.

Dear colleagues, throughout the years of regional and global conflict, the Palestinian problem became one of the most challenging issues of the UN agenda. But the most important thing needed to achieve resolution is genial and sincere political will for the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. Without it, no matter how much or how long we continue our debate, the situation on the ground will not change and innocent people will continue to lose not only their homes and lives, but even a mere hope for their future. We simply cannot let it happen.

Thank you.

Moderator: I'd like to thank the Permanent Representative of Ukraine, and especially the DPR of Angola. Please take the floor.

Angola: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, as Co-Chair of this significant meeting, we feel how important it is to continue shining light on this historical injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people, which unfortunately has not been possible to redress until today. We thank our briefers for their objective and dispassionate presentations to the Council. These are informative.

The issue assumes greater gravity since after 50 years of the Palestinian territory occupation and colonization in the aftermath of the so-called Six Days' War, the Palestinians continue facing injustice, occupation and operation on a daily basis, while members of the Security Council, we will use our limited time spent to voice our opinion, our deep concern, and work with like-minded partners in doing our utmost to bring about change and put an end to such detrimental status. In our deliberations in the Council on the Middle East conflicts, we constantly hear and voice how important it is the respect of international humanitarian, anyone writes law, Israeli is of relevant United Nations resolutions. However, Security Council has been incapable of taking appropriate measures to end the occupation of the Palestinian state and Palestinian territories by Israel.

The great paradox of this issue is that since establishment of the responsibility to protect the concept, and Security Council made the protection of civilians central to mandates of peacekeeping operations and great powers used it to intervene militarily and went far away, or far enough to change regimes in place, Israel is in complete impunity—in complete impunity continue violating international law. And instead of protecting populations under its occupations, under its occupations as it should do, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, oppresses them and doesn’t take due care of the basic interests as people under occupation. It is unacceptable that after so many decades, special protection is denied to the Palestinian people in the international fora, especially by United Nations Security Council, in flagrant disregard to the basic principles and decisions. We need a consensus of the Council for effective action.

Israel as an occupying power has used this status to continually undermine the possibility of a two-state solution of Israel and Palestine as independent states who are existing in a land that most human beings consider as holy and to whom human history is profoundly indebted.

However, this very land is the scenario and the scenery of the most undesirable deals, and to be concrete, we witness that, and in this community and in this proportionate approach by the Israel Defense Forces towards Palestinian civilians, which include arbitrary arrests and detentions, and targeting of many co-facilities and schools, policies of collective punishment through home demolitions, rendering Palestinian families, including children, homeless and destitute. And more apt for the future prospects of the political solution to the issue the continued settlement expansion by Israeli authorities and the grabbing of Palestinian land as a clear demonstration of a systematic and willingness to facilitate a return to negotiations and a resolution to the conflict based on a two-state solution.

With most of the international community’s attention focused on Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya, we must not forget that the Palestinian question is the central issue in all the equation of the Middle Eastern conflicts. Direct and unified action by the international community and Security Council in particular is essential if you are to preserve the prospect of a peaceful endurable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Middle East is experienced unparalleled sectarian religious and ethnic divisions, fueling devastating wars and giving rise to the most brutal extremist groups. In order to counter extremes and begin fostering peaceful coexistence between the peoples of the region, we must end hypocrisy, double standards, and the Palestinians deserve not only protection but also to be freed from occupation and the enjoyment of the right to live in peace and dignity within that sovereign state, based on a two-state solution, long accepted by not acted upon.

In this connection we look forward to see the French-proposed initiative to be taken to the next level before it is too late and random for it.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Moderator: I’d like to thank the Deputy Representative of Angola. I’m going to give the floor to the Deputy PR of Japan.

Japan: Thank you, Co-Chair. I’d like to thank the Permanent Representatives and Permanent Missions of Angola, Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela for hosting this meeting. I would also like to thank today’s speakers for their sobering briefings for what is happening there.

Allow me first to reiterate that Japan condemns all acts of violence for incitement, whether directed at an Israeli or Palestinian. We are deeply concerned that the incitement of violence has not subsided, and the distrust is growing on both sides. The current situation did not arise in a vacuum. Grim economic prospects, social marginalization, illegal settlement, and the stagnation of the peace process have all served as fodder for discontent. The international community, including this council, cannot remain silent.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, security measures alone will not stop the violence. The people of Palestine have seen neither tangible advance towards in the peace process nor concrete visions of a viable economy in which to prosper. These underlying factors must also be addressed. In this regard, I would like to highlight three points: The importance of recovering mutual trust between the parties, including through impartial and proportionate law enforcement measures; and addressing the economic situation; and thirdly achieving progress towards a two-state solution.

First, we fully respect the need to maintain law and order. Nonetheless, law enforcement must be impartial without a distinction between Palestinian and Israeli, as well as proportionate particularly in light of the already volatile situation. In this regard, we believe that the use of live ammunition against civilians should only come as a last resort. We also call on Israel to refrain from acts such as home demolitions, which only fuel resentment. Civilians must be humanely treated and protected in accordance with the international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. The ban called on both sides to unequivocally denounce violence, to maintain their vital main security operation, and to bring to justice those who stray from the law without fail.

Secondly, we must help address the economic situation that is draining the hope for better livelihood. We had at last—we had a last July’s Arria-formula meeting of the devastating economic situation in Gaza. There, unemployment rates reached 60%. The situation has unfortunately not improved since then.

In March this year, Japan dispersed $78 million for the people of Palestine for a total of $1.7 billion U.S. dollars contributed since 1993. It is our belief that improving the livelihood of individuals, including the most vulnerable, including women and children, and promoting economic self-reliance underpins the viability of two-state solution. However, international economic assistance is not enough. Constraints on the economy should be eased. So we look for the Gaza blockade to be lifted and movement restrictions in the West Bank to be eased with due concern for Israel’s security.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, 20 years have passed since the Oslo Agreement Oslo Accords without a two-state solution is undermining people’s faith that a two-state settlement might be attainable. I would be keen to know the briefer’s perspective on the matter; how people in Palestine now think about, which is do they still keep their hope in the two-state solution? Japan, for its part, regulates our position of fully supporting a two-state solution.

Progress on the political front is urgently needed. It is true that the Middle East peace is contingent upon an agreement between the two parties. Nonetheless, the current impasse of direct negotiations should not prevent the international community, including this Council, to contribute to fostering an environment conducive to the resumption of negotiations. In this regard, we look forward to the Quartet’s report to provide constructive recommendations on ways to advance the peace process. Japan looks to contribute proactively through initiatives inside and outside the Council, including the French initiative to hold an international conference, which Japan welcomes very much, and which would surely pave the way towards a long, overdue political solution.

Thank you very much.

Moderator: I’d like to thank the Permanent Representative of Japan, the Deputy Permanent Representative, and I’ll give the floor to the Representative of the United States. You have the floor.

United States of America: Thank you. All of us here today are here because we are invested in diplomacy as an alternative to violence. We all agree that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has gone on for too long, and we are concerned about the ongoing overall trends on the ground and how they undermine prospects for a two-state solution. This Arria-formula meeting is unfortunately centered on only one aspect of the violence on the ground, acts perpetrated against Palestinian civilians, but there is more to the story, including terrorist attacks perpetrated against Israeli civilians.

We all strongly condemn such attacks, for which there can be no justification. The terrorism and violence needs to stop. This means ending the terrorism that has claimed too many lives, Israelis, Palestinians, Americans, and others over the past seven months. Let me be clear, this means ending incitement to violence, ending glorification of violence and sending a clear message that terrorism is terrorism. It is bloody. It is wrong. It must stop.

As both President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have made clear, Israel has the right to defend itself in the face of terrorism. The United States is concerned about credible reports of excessive use of force against Palestinians. It is critical that every possible effort be taken to show restraint, guard against loss of life and de-escalate tensions, but we reject completely any comparison between the actions of Israel and those of Nazi Germany, which we find deeply offensive.

We are also closely following the demolitions and evictions undertaken by the Israeli authorities in several locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, actions which undermine the possibility of a two-state solution and call into question the Israeli government’s commitment to one.

The humanitarian situation, especially in the Gaza Strip, is also of deep concern for the United States. Palestinians in Gaza face extraordinary challenges in their daily lives. The United States has provided an initial contribution of $43.4 million to UNRWA’s $403 million emergency appeal for its operations in the West Bank and Gaza launched in January. In fact, the United States is the largest bilateral donor to UNRWA. We urge all members of the Security Council with concern for the Palestinian people to join us in meeting these needs.

We must address legitimate security concerns, including efforts to infiltrate Israel through underground tunnels. At the same time, in order to sustainably improve the livelihoods of people on the ground, we must address underlying economic challenges, including opening Gaza border crossing points, streamlining the civilian work force, addressing infrastructure needs, and promoting broader economic recovery. The supply of illicit arms to Gaza must be disrupted and the Palestinian authorities effective control of Gaza restored.

To conclude, we want to reiterate what we have said before in other forums. We recognize that the status quo is unsustainable, and the two-state solution is the only feasible way to end the violence and achieve long-term peace.

Thank you.

Moderator: I’d like to thank the Representative of the United States of America, and I’ll give the floor to the Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain-Northern Ireland.

United Kingdom of Great Britain-Northern Ireland: Thank you very much, and thank you to the five co-sponsors of this event, and to the three speakers at the beginning. Thank you very much.

The plight of the civilians affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a source of deep concern to the British people and the British government. The lives of Israelis and Palestinians have been blighted too long by violence and the trials of life under occupation. Only a full peace agreement will deliver a lasting protection that civilians on both sides need and deserve. We must continue to strive for this, but even without immediate progress towards peace, there is more that can be done to improve the conditions under which civilians currently live.

First, I would like to talk about the current violence, which has claimed far too many Israeli and Palestinian lives. We condemn all acts of violence, whoever the perpetrator. Nothing can justify attacks on civilians. Levels of violence appear, thankfully, to have dropped slightly in recent weeks, but the parties must continue to do all they can to calm the situation. They must clamp down on incitement, avoid any inflammatory steps, and seek to address the fundamental causes of the conflict. Without this, the potential for sudden deterioration remains.

Second, I would like to underline the impact of the occupation on civilians’ lives. Often we talk about the impact of Israeli actions, particularly in the West Bank on the viability of the two-state solution. It’s right to focus on this, but we must not forget the daily impact of the occupation on Palestinian civilian lives. I would add that whatever one’s views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, using language like the final solution to describe the Israeli policy is in United Kingdom’s view both tactless and offensive.

Moving on, when the Sub Laban family in the Old City of Jerusalem are threatened with eviction from their home of 63 years, this is worrying on a human level, not just a political level. Yes, Jerusalem status as the future capital of both Israel and a Palestinian state must not be undermined. But the impact eviction has on a family like the Sub Labans is almost beyond comprehension. It will only destroy future generation’s belief in the possibility of progress towards peace.

Similarly, we have watched with dismay as the rate of Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures has spiked in recent months. In the first quarter of this year the number of Israeli demolitions has already exceeded the total number of demolitions for the whole of 2015. The village of Khirbet Tana, a community near Nablus, has faced three waves of demolitions this year, including demolition of houses, barns, and the only school. Again, the impact is human and political. They have a terrible impact on the lives of those effected, and they are wholly inconsistent with progress towards a two-state solution.

The construction of the separation barrier is also a cause of great concern. In Cremisan for example, construction of the barrier is illegal, as is the case with 85% of the planned route. In Cremisan, 58 families risk being blocked from their land, their schools, and their healthcare facilities. That’s 58 families whose faith in peace could be shattered.

We have seen some limited positive steps from Israel in the West Bank, but these do need to go further. For example, greater Palestinian authority control of Area C, including a clear legal route for Palestinian construction would have a transformative effect on the Palestinian civilians living there.

Over recent years we have followed the stories of the Sub Laban family, Khirbet Tana, and Cremisan with great concern. We will continue to do so, and continue to stress to Israel that actions such as these not only go against their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and their long-term interests, but also cause unnecessary suffering for ordinary people, ordinary families. These are the very people who need to believe that peace is possible.

Finally, I would like to touch on the situation in Gaza. Two years after the last conflict, conditions remain dire for ordinary Gazans. As part of any durable solution to the situation there, we need to see Hamas committing to a permanent end of rocket fire and other attacks against Israel. We call on Hamas to change its course and turn away from violence, including the construction of offensive tunnels.

Any durable solution will also involve a transformation in conditions on the ground. We welcome progress to date on reconstruction and the increased level of exports that Israel is allowing out of Gaza. But Israel needs to go further to lift restrictions on Gaza. Improving Gaza’s provision of electricity, which will in turn improve Gaza’s water supply and wastewater treatment is particularly critical. These changes would have a positive impact on Palestinians and Israelis, who are at risk from water pollution in and around Gaza.

Over the coming months as we seek to renew progress towards the two-state solution, it is important that we consider the plight of the civilians on both sides who are most affected by the conflict. The longer people suffer, the more they will turn away from peace, and no amount of international initiatives will be able to convince them that progress is possible.

Thank you.

Moderator: I’d like to thank the Representative of the United Kingdom. I’m going to give the floor to the Representative of China.

China: I would like to thank Egypt, Angola, Malaysia, Senegal, and Venezuela for their joint initiative in convening today’s meeting. I’d like to thank the briefings by the three keynote speakers.

The Palestine question is central to the question of the Middle East. Safeguarding the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people is a common responsibility of the international community. China would like to thank Senegal for convening in Dakar the conference on the question of Jerusalem by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I would like to comment Senegal as a Chair of the Committee for its important role played in resolving the Palestine question.

At the moment, the situation in Palestine and Israel is serious, with widened crashes on the rise, security situation worsening, and the humanitarian catastrophe deepening. And the international community should focus on the following areas: First, adhere to the right path of establishing an independent Palestine state and the peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel, and it should be based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, and the establishment of the state should have full sovereignty. And this is the end of the rise of the Palestinian people and is the key to the resolution of the Palestinian question.

Secondly, adhere to the peace talks is the only way forward. Stalemate in peace talks will only worsen conflict, fuel hatred and drag both Palestine and Israel into the vicious circle of escalating violence, for which both sides will pay a heavy price. Only through an early resumption of negotiations can peace and stability be achieved in Palestine and the region, and this is in the interests of both Palestine and Israel.

Three, adhere to the principle of land-for-peace two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant UN resolutions such that promote the peace process. All the parties should continue to steadfastly adhere to the above-mentioned basis and focus on their attention on the process of political settlement.

Four, take concrete steps to ease humanitarian situation and promote the peace process in the Middle East. Israel should take the lead in showing sincerity, take practical measures, cease looting settlements, and end demolition of Palestinian houses, stop violence targeting at innocent Syrians, and lift its blockade off Gaza, and create conditions for the resumption of talks. At the same time, the legitimate security concerns of regional countries should be respected.

Five, the international community should be the important guarantee for the promotion of the peace process. Recently, the international community has been instigating of these efforts in resolving the question and put forward proposals such as the setting up of international support group, and the convening of international peace conference, and expanding peace promoting forces in the Middle East. And the international community should work hard to turn these positive momentums into concrete actions and achieve results. And the Security Council should positively respond to the legitimate appeals of Palestine and Arab countries, and carefully study draft resolutions such as providing international support for the Palestinian people and ending the expansion and building of settlements, take necessary steps, and promote the resumption of talks.

Sixth, the international community should work towards the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Palestine and continue to push forward the economic reconstruction. China urges Israel to cooperate with international assistance efforts and fully lift its blockade of Gaza. And all parties should respond to UN’s assistance plan to Palestine, and scale up the assistance to Gaza, and engage in economic cooperation with Palestine, and improve the humanitarian situation, and the living conditions of the Palestinian people so that people can see hope.

China has been consistent in its support for the Palestinian people in their fight for religion and national rights, and we have been committed in promoting peace and negotiations. In 2013 President Xi put forward four-point proposals on resolving the question. In January 2016, President Xi, while visiting the Middle East, reiterated China’s resolute support for the just cause of the Palestinian people. The Special Envoy on The Middle East of the Chinese Government is also actively promoting peace and negotiations. China each year through the UN or bilateral channels has been providing economic assistance to Palestine so as to improve people’s livelihood.

Last January, China decided to provide 50 million RMB worth of grant to the Palestinian people. China is ready to work with the international community to continue our efforts in pushing for appropriate settlement to the Palestinian question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Moderator: I thank the Representative of China, and I will now give the floor to the Deputy Permanent Representative of Malaysia. You have the floor, Madam.

Malaysia: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. As well on the Co-Chairs of this meeting, I would like to extend my delegation’s deep appreciation to the speakers for their participation in this session and for the excellent presentations.

We find your arguments very compelling in support for the call for international protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. Malaysia believes that the Council should seriously consider the call for international protection, pending a final and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian questions, since the Palestinian civilian population is defenseless, living under repressive occupation, and being deprived of basic human rights on a daily basis.

We have heard from the speakers about Israel’s violations of international law, including international humanitarian law, and international human rights law, ICJ decision, and Security Council resolutions. These violations are not one-off isolated incidents. Instead, they are part of systematic and entrenched policies of the occupying power, exercised with complete impunity for the case. The lack of accountability is the main reason why we need to protect the Palestinian civilian population. Living under occupation and under a blockade, the Palestinians do not have any effect recourse for justice, freedom, equality, and human rights.

The issue or protection of children has been elaborated by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, and I wish to strongly support the points that he raised. In effect, the Palestinian civilian population has no protections against war crimes or crimes against humanity being committed against them, no protection against extrajudicial killings; no protection against being shot and killed while participating in peaceful demonstrations; no protection against arbitrary arrest and administrative detentions; even for a child. No protection in places that were supposed to be safe havens, such as hospitals or UN schools. No protection from discriminatory policies and no protections against their land and property being confiscated at will by the occupying power.

In the history of the UN, we have seen numerous precedents for international protection, including in Kosovo, East Timor, Lebanon, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and even in Palestine itself. As we have heard from Mr. Ardi Imseis, this Security Council had adopted Resolution 605, which among others, requested the Secretary-General to recommend with and means to ensure the safety and protection of civilians, Palestinian civilians, under Israeli occupation. And the Secretary-General in his report dated 21st January 1988 outlined several possible forms of protection for Palestinians, including physical protection, legal protection, general assistance and protection by publicity.

These are among the various types of international protection that the Council could consider. We should in fact request the Secretary-General for an updated study on protection in view of the deteriorating situation on the ground. Unfortunately, at present, when the situation on the ground is much worse, the Council could not agree to adopt any outcome document on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not even press elements as highlighted by the Permanent Representative of Venezuela in his intervention earlier. Moreover, the Council could not even discuss the proposal for international protection or to request further study of the proposal by the UN. Somehow, protection becomes a taboo word in the Council.

I wish to stress that the Palestinian people living under occupation for decades should not be perceived as being less worthy of protection by this council. By co-organizing this Arria meeting on protection, we hope to start a serious dialogue on the proposal and to make concrete steps to realize it.

It is not as if we are asking for something that is beyond international law or beyond the international standard of human rights. Instead, international protection is in line with international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions.

Malaysia strongly believes that such international protection could go a long way in ending impunity in the protection of civilians in the occupied territory and in maintaining peace and security in the region, pending the final comprehensive settlement to end Israeli occupation. Protection should not be viewed as undermining any diplomatic efforts or negotiations process. This argument has become an all-too-common excuse to perpetuate the status quo and to crush any initiative on Palestine. Instead, international protection in various forms could be an effective stop-gap measure from the escalating violence and a much-needed confidence-building measure that could go a long way to ensure stability and security for both sites, thus creating the enabling environment for the parties to return to the negotiating table.

Before I end my intervention, I would like to take this opportunity to pose several questions to the speakers. What sort of protection in your opinion would be the most realistic to achieve and the most effective in halting the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law of the Palestinian in the occupied territory?

To what extent do you think the public opinion in Israel could be galvanized to pressure the government and its leaders to cease the violations of international law and human rights standards and to salvage the two-state solution?

And my last question relates to the so-called "protection by publicity", as one form of protection as outlined by the Secretary-General in 1988. He was the opinion that by publicizing the situation in the occupied territory through the media, it could provide some sort of protection for the Palestinian people. I'm interested to hear your thoughts on this, especially in view of attempts by the Israeli government to cut freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press as well as the usage of social media in Israel and in the occupied Palestine territory.

I thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

Moderator: Malaysia Co-Chair. I give the floor to the Permanent Deputy Representative of Egypt.

Egypt: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair, gentlemen co-sponsoring the meeting, ladies and gentlemen. I want to express full satisfaction with the organization of this meeting and the valuable interventions and comprehensive briefings, which highlights the unalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their natural, normal right to obtain international protection as guaranteed by the rules of international humanitarian law and relevant UN resolutions. The level of attendance and the obvious interest by most members of the UN reflect international commitment and interest on the part of the entire international community that Palestine has all the components of a state as a people, as a state, as a territory and whose rights as a genuine exercise of sovereignty, an overwhelming vote of the GA of the 29th November 2012 on the membership of Palestine speaks eloquently for that.

My delegation would like to affirm before you today that there is no one above international law. No state is above the international law, and that Israeli occupation is doomed to end no matter how long it takes. Each affirms that it is committed in accordance with the considerations of history, geography and the bonds of Palestinian-Egyptian friendship, and in the context of Israel in the regional and international context to extend full support for the legitimate Palestinian rights in accordance with relevant UN resolutions. No party or objective observer can outbid Egypt in this established commitment to the support of the Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip in Gaza and fulfilling their legitimate aspirations and needs.

I would like to salute Mr. Michael Sfard from Yesh Din for his comprehensive briefing, and I look forward for him further highlighting the efforts by his organization and similar Israeli organizations which stand up to the Israeli settler colonialism in the Palestinian territories. I would like for him to clarify his estimate of the extent of response by the Israeli public opinion to their efforts.

I associate myself with my Japanese colleague in his question about the extent of the belief by the Israeli public opinion in the two-state solution. I also look forward to knowing any requirements of these Israeli NGOs working in that regard by the international support to support their laudable and needed efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

Moderator: I thank the Deputy Permanent Representative of Egypt. Before we continue, I noticed that we started 15 minutes late and we only have 20 minutes left, so as to accommodate a last round of presentations and answers from our excellent panelists, may I call on our interpreters and ask them whether they can, if necessary, give us 15 minutes more after 6 o'clock.

Yes, sir. The answer is yes, sir. Interpreters say yes.

I noticed that we have their agreement, but I also ask the next speakers to be brief because our colleagues in France and Venezuela wish to take the floor once again. So may I please ask them to take no more than two minutes? France is recognized, followed by Venezuela.

France: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. I’ll try to be very brief. We think it's also very important for us to have today's meeting because of protection of Palestinian civilian populations in accordance with international law is fundamental as far as France is concerned. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of France will be paying a visit to the region on the 14th and the 15th of May to launch our initiative. He will do everything possible to preserve the two-state solution. My country nevertheless regrets the inappropriate historic comparisons, and this a few days away from the 8th and the 9th May civilizations. We believe that in respect to the Israeli and Palestinian populations, we should do everything possible to advance the cause of this.

Thank you.

Moderator: Venezuela is now recognized. Mr. Ambassador?

Venezuela: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. Actually, based on France's, the U.K.'s and the U.S.'s statement, I just wish to clarify that our country respects and agrees with the existence of the State of Israel. Of course we do. And we would also call for the right of the Palestinian people to exist and the State of Palestine to exist, to be respected.

But I just wanted to point out something which we thought was interesting. How we approach this issue as a Security Council, what do we plan to do with the Palestinians? What solution do we plan to have for the Palestinian people?

I didn’t want to create this—compare this with fascism, but I think that is one of the worst examples that we could have and we don't want to see this situation worsen. So I don't want any delegation to divert from the purpose of this meeting or to misinterpret our position, which of course is to recognize the existence of both states.

Thank you, sir.

Moderator: I thank the Ambassador of Venezuela. In Senegal's national capacity, we don't wish to prolong the debate, but Representative of China mentioned just now that earlier this week, on the 3rd and 4th of May, there was an international conference on the central issue of Jerusalem. In fact, I came straight from the airport to here and the Ambassador of the State of Palestine was there in attendance and along with the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States and the African Union and the Committee for the Unalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. And we tried to focus our efforts on a discussion on Jerusalem.

One of the things I've always said is the litmus test for all that the UN stands for, be it peace and security, be it development, be it human rights, the delegation of Senegal shares this view. We would ask a simple question of our panelists. In the concept note that I’m sure you received with invitation, and we thank you for accepting our invitation, by the way.

There are several avenues that had an outline for possible action, and my colleague from Malaysia just mentioned a few of the main ones. My question is field missions applied to Palestine; the Security Council may wish to explore the creation of a new field mission equipped with a Chapter 6 mandate to protect civilians in the occupied Palestine territories through unarmed civilian approaches. What do you think of this possible option?

Second and last question though is expanding the road the United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency of Palestine refugees in the Middle East, UNRWA, and greater support and coordination with the international Red Cross. This question we also address to the representative of Human Rights Watch. Thank you.

Let's now turn the floor back over to our panelists, and after their statements Ambassador Rafael Ramirez of Venezuela will have the honor of delivering the closing remarks.

I now give the floor to the panelists in the order in which they took the floor previously. Mr. Imseis, you have the floor.

Mr. Adri Imseis: Thank you very much, Ambassador. There were a good number of questions that we'll put silently selective and answer the ones I think I'm most equipped to do, even though those who know me will know I want to answer everything that comes to me. So here we are.

What do people—the Ambassador, the Deputy Ambassador of Japan asked what do people in Palestine think of the two-state solution? Very quickly, not only in Palestine, of course I lived there for over a decade, finished up with UNRWA in 2014, so it's relatively fresh. Not only in Palestine, but I would reckon based on my very close examination of this globally, in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Africa, Asia, and so forth, more and more people are beginning to come to the conclusion that because of the occupying power's success, if you want, in colonizing the territory, usurping its natural resources, reifying Palestinian existence in this space and depopulating the space of its indigenous Palestinian protected population over some 50 years now, that they “through their successes”, I say in inverted commas, in violating the laws in doing this have basically undermined their own position, right? Because Israel and the Jewish people do have a right to exercise self-determination. They do have a right to peace and security. They have their state. Problem is, they’re expanding into somebody else’s state. And they’re so successful in doing so that people have begun to think about the impossibility, if you want, of unscrambling the egg, as they say. So it is—the hour is very much late, and that is why each one of us who care tremendously about peace between Israelis and Palestinians need to think very long and hard about what actual actions need to be taken, not mere statements or affirmations of laws. What actions need to be taken to ensure that result? We fail to do so at our own peril.

The next question, what sort of protection—from the Malaysian delegate, what sort of protection is the most realistic? Well, that is up to you, members of the Security Council and member states of the United Nations. The fact of the matter is, there is no shortage of options available. I tried in my speech to offer a few of them. I won't presume what any single member state of Security Council's views are, but one thing that we need to be thinking about is what options are available?

The Goulding Report offers a sample of what is available, a la 1987. Having practiced the law for UNRWA and worked in the area of protection for UNRWA for a very long time, I can say we did that sort of work. I can also say unreservedly that as I said in my talk, events have overtaken humanitarian actors. So this is a question that must be reopened fresh and examined.

Of note, and moving into the question that was brought up here by Ambassador Seck, regarding our views concerning the unarmed observer force or expanding the operations of UNRWA, of note, there is a very large contingent of United Nations officials and various bodies on the ground in occupied Palestine per capita. I would venture a guess that it's probably the largest presence most anywhere in the world, per capita that is to say, the population that is being served by them. That includes military observers in UNTSO, the oldest—the peacekeeping force in Jerusalem sitting at Government House. UNRWA, the largest in terms of the numbers of staff of UN officials and the largest UN organization on earth: 33,000 staff, and in occupied Palestine, 15,000.

There are great challenges for UNRWA staff. These be protection of the civilian population, but following the Goulding Report in 1988, UNRWA's mandate, if you want, was expanded and they had something called the Refugee Affairs Program created. And the Refugee Affairs officers would roam around the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and engage with the Israeli authorities in an attempt to provide, among other things, protection by presence and legal assistance and so forth. That program was wound up sometime in the early to mid-'90s, and today there is something called the Operations Support Officer Program with, to my knowledge, generous funding from the United States which, among other things, assists the agency in maintaining its neutrality on the one hand, but also the agency, through these operations support officers, protection of the Palestinian refugee population and other Palestinians of concern.

I do concur with Ambassador Seck that this is something that the Security Council and others, the General Assembly, given that UNRWA is a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, should be looking afresh at these things. Those are some options.

Protection by publicity, I'll end on this question from Malaysia was, does this work? Yes, in some circumstances it has worked, but only to forestall what actors on the ground believe would be otherwise certain action by the occupying power. Forestall it, postpone it for a time, but what the historical record shows is that because the occupying power has been in the presence, in control of occupied Palestine for 50 years, they just wait it out and then give effect to the policy, the goal, that they have in mind. I have particular experience in dealing with this at UNRWA at Sheikh Jarrah with the Palestine refugee community there who is under threat of forceful transfer. We managed through the engagement of many member states of the United Nations to delay, forestall Israeli acts, but those acts are still in the—how do you say—in the plans, and they have not been taken off the Israeli shelf, so to speak.

I'll stop there and let my colleagues answer questions.

Ms. Sarah Leah Whitson: Starting I think from the particular to the broader, in terms of the question from the Representative of Spain about the number of permits that have been granted to Palestinians to develop their land, I think the answer is quite telling of the entire facade with which there is some kind of administrative and due process and legal protection for Palestinians living under occupation, which is the facade of legal measures where you can apply for a permit and, well, your house is being demolished because you don't have a permit. But when you scratch the surface, you see that in all of Area C, which is 60% of the West Bank that’s under Israeli control, only 1% of the land is zoned for residential permit applications. So in 99% of Area C, you can't even apply for a permit.

And in that 1% of land where Palestinians can apply to the Israelis for a permit to add a second floor to their house because their son got married, 93% of the applications between 2000 and 2012 were rejected. And, for example, in all of last year in 2015, one permit, one permit, not 1%, one permit was approved.

And so I invite you to look beyond, well, there's a judicial process. Well, we have courts, we have trials, you have permits, you have zoning, and look beyond what is really a facade of stopping all Palestinian growth in the area under occupation, while hundreds and thousands of settlements grow and grow and grow.

With respect to the points that were made by a couple of people about incitement, I think incitement is a bad thing, but I think we should all be very conscious that incitement happens not just by Palestinians, but also by Israelis and I think that's something that Israeli human rights groups have noted with great concern, and I would even say with even greater concern when Israeli government officials speak incitement that actually leads to killings not just by random lone-wolf actors, but by Israeli security forces. For example, when the Israeli Justice Minister posts on her Facebook lines that says that Palestinian children are little snakes, and says—and I quote— “that all of the Palestinian population are the enemy”, and the next day a Palestinian child is abducted and burned to death. And on top of that, the very clear message of incitement that comes from process of impunity, that's the kind of incitement we should be very concerned about and condemning at least equally to the extent that we breathe words condemning the incitement by Palestinians. All incitement is bad, not incitement by some.

And similarly, when there was a criticism, I think, about the extent to which this panel was focused on Israeli abuses, I think at least in my remarks or Michael’s remarks, I would invite everyone to maybe pro rata have as many words to say about Israeli abuses to Palestinian abuses. And I think that if anything, the balance is very, very skewed by some member states who spend the vast majority of their time complaining about Palestinian incitement and terrorism, which we should condemn, but often have very little to say and really are of no response to, for example, the Israeli settlement growth, which I don't think has any connection to either Palestinian incitement or Palestinian terrorism.

And finally, I am glad that so many members have spoken about a peace process and reigniting the peace process and the two-state solution that is near death, but two remarks on that point, which is one I think all of us are probably guilty of reciting these sort of talking points by rote. I have been hearing about the near-death of the two-state solution for over 10 years, and I wonder where in our minds we see that number reached, that death reached, and is that ever going to happen? Or do we just recite it without any substance or meaning?

And similarly with the peace process; that's great, it's welcome, we hope it progresses. But the problem is that Palestinians are asked to put their rights on hold, to continue to live under military occupation, to continue to have military law applied to them, until such time as a peace process will resolve all of that. And what we're asking, I think in this panel, is that there be robust protection of civilians now, actions taken by the Security Council now, even if you want to pursue a peace process, because 10, 20 years from now, we may be still sitting here talking about the need for a peace process, but in the meanwhile that can't be an excuse to do nothing. And that's what we've been doing, nothing, on the protection of Palestinians living under a very brutal military occupation.

The Security Council has shown itself very capable of taking very robust measures to protect civilians. I think 315 Libyans had died, peaceful protesters had died when the Security Council voted to take military action in Libya. I think many can debate the merits of that, but the point is it shows that there is a will to take action there, there is a capacity and the ability to take action. Fifty years of military occupation with all of the abuse that we've talked about now, and I don't think there has ever been enforcement of a single UN Security Council resolution.

Moderator: Thank you, Ms. Whitson. You have the floor, sir.

Mr. Michael Sfard: And I'll be short for the sake of the translators. Before I touch the issue of what sort of protection, I would like to make an important comment on my part. If there was a use of the term final solution in respect to the Israeli—in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then it is offensive, it is angering, and it is completely incorrect.

Now, I don’t think that it is my place to propose for the Security Council what kind of measures to take to make sure that Palestinians receive the protection they are entitled to. But I would like to say that Israel is still a democracy. It has the ability to provide protection and enforcement at a level that is compatible with international law. It doesn't do so probably and unfortunately because currently, it lacks the will to do so. I know that there have been many Security Council resolutions declaring settlements illegal, demanding enforcement of the law on offenders, but I’m not sure there was a single Security Council resolution that is binding and which demands Israel to stop all settlement activity.

As I have remarked in my brief—in my presentation, we feel that much of the source of human rights violations of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank especially is due to the settlement enterprise and because of the colonization, the Israeli colonization of the West Bank. And this is definitely something that the Security Council can and should deal with. I think that the UN and the Security Council can and should enhance their monitoring capacities on the ground, but in that respect I do believe that publicity is an effective tool because the Israeli public opinion is an effective tool to bring change.

And finally, I believe that maintaining this issue on the floor of the Security Council and other international institutions is important and is good both for Palestine and for the State of Israel. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. A round of applause maybe for the briefers. Ambassador Rafael Ramirez, over to you, Co-Chair. Thank you.

Venezuela: Thank you. It falls to me to close today's meeting. I think it has been a very important event. This event helped us to gain a glance of discussions within the Security Council on the Palestinian question. I think that the three presentations of the three speakers that we have before us have been impeccable in their various spheres of influence and specialty, and probably their presentations should be presentations that we can circulate around the members of the United Nations. And I think that their contribution has been very useful to the discussion that we have been continuing.

And I want to say to Michael, that if I have offended the Jewish people in any way, it was not my intention, and I apologize sincerely. We are just trying to find a political solution to this issue.

I think that this kind of meeting, informal meetings with the Security Council and the entire membership of the United Nations community is a useful exercise if we are indeed to keep this issue on the table and under discussion. And it is my hope that the Security Council will be able to take a step forward towards finding a solution, a good solution to this issue. But I share the words that were uttered by Ms. Sarah Leah when she said that Palestine and the Palestinian people cannot lay down their rights or postpone their rights, and we need to find a solution for them here and now. I think it was an excellent event.

Thank you very much.