



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
16 December 2020

Original: English

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## Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is the sixteenth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). The reporting period is from 21 September to 10 December 2020.

#### II. Settlement activities

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

3. On 14 and 15 October, in one of the largest collective advancements in recent years, the Israeli authorities approved construction plans for some 5,000 housing units in Area C, approximately 80 per cent of which are planned in settlements in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank, in areas further impeding the contiguity of a future Palestinian State.

4. The plans include the retroactive legalization, under Israeli law, of the Tapuach West outpost (133 units) near the Kfar Tapuach settlement south of Nablus, and the Pnei Kedem outpost (120 units) near the Metzad settlement north-east of Hebron; the approval of 629 units in Eli, including the retroactive legalization, under Israeli law, of 61 illegally constructed units; and the approval of 560 units in Har Gilo, which will further sever the territorial contiguity between Bethlehem and the village of al-Walaja to its north-west.

5. On 15 November, the Israeli authorities opened the bidding process for the construction of 1,200 housing units in the Givat Hamatos settlement in East Jerusalem. If completed, this project would further consolidate a ring of settlements along the southern perimeter of Jerusalem, separating East Jerusalem from Bethlehem



and the southern West Bank, significantly damaging prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian State.

6. On 23 November, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a plan for the construction of some 540 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa.

7. On 29 November, the High Court of Justice of Israel upheld the declaration of areas in and around the Palestinian neighbourhood of Kafr Aqab, including the land on which the Kochav Ya'akov settlement is built, as State land.

8. At the beginning of October, an Israeli outpost was reportedly established in the Beit Dajan area, west of Nablus, and another was reportedly erected on a hill 4.5 km east of the Shiloh settlement, where a military base was previously located.

9. During the reporting period, demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Citing the absence of Israeli-issued building permits, which remain almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain, the Israeli authorities demolished, forced people to demolish or seized 290 structures, resulting in the displacement of 251 people, including 128 children and 63 women, with some 2,500 others also adversely affected.

10. At least 56 of the structures targeted were dismantled and seized without prior notice based on military regulations allowing the summary requisition of “newly installed” structures defined as “movable” or suspected to be used to commit a criminal offence. A total of 38 structures were demolished on the basis of military order No. 1797, which authorizes an expedited process that gives owners only 96 hours to demonstrate that they possess a valid building permit. Another 8 structures were demolished by their respective owners following receipt of demolition orders. A total of 73 structures demolished or seized were donor-funded.

11. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, 52 schools in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, face pending “stop work” or demolition orders, which, if implemented, would affect some 5,200 students.

12. In 2020, demolitions and seizures by the Israeli authorities of Palestinian-owned property in Area C rose by 72 per cent compared with 2019. In East Jerusalem, while an 18 per cent decline in demolitions was observed, there was a 47 per cent increase in the number of structures demolished by their respective owners following receipt of demolition orders compared with 2019.

13. On 28 October, the Israeli authorities cut a donor-funded pipe supplying water to 14 herding communities in the Masafer Yatta area of Hebron, home to about 1,400 people, including over 600 children.

14. On 2 November, the Israeli Government informed the High Court of Justice that it would not demolish the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in the next four months. In its explanation, the Government cited restrictions related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and “additional considerations” as the reasons for the delay and said that it would use the additional time to exhaust efforts to reach an agreement with the residents.

15. On 3 November, the Israeli authorities carried out the most extensive demolition in the occupied West Bank of the past decade, destroying over 80 structures, including homes, in the Bedouin community of Humsa Al Bqai’a, in Area C. Seventy-three people were displaced, including 41 children. Decade-long petitions and appeals against the demolitions were rejected by the High Court of Justice.

16. On 23 November, the Jerusalem District Court rejected an appeal by a Palestinian family, ruling that they must vacate their home in Batan al-Hawa, in the

neighbourhood of Silwan, in favour of settlers. The 26 family members have lived in the home since before 1967.

### III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

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

18. The reporting period was characterized by daily acts of violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, settler-related violence, stabbing attacks or alleged attempted attacks, the throwing of rocks and Molotov cocktails by Palestinians, the firing of rockets by Palestinian militants from Gaza towards Israel, retaliatory Israeli airstrikes against militant targets in Gaza and the use of lethal force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians.

19. Overall, five Palestinians, including two children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations and other incidents across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and 428 Palestinians, including 2 women and 41 children, were injured, including 36 by live ammunition. Eleven members of the Israeli security forces and 15 Israeli civilians, including two women, were injured by Palestinians in clashes, rock and Molotov cocktail throwing and other incidents.

20. In Gaza, while a relative calm largely prevailed, Palestinian militants launched eight rockets and seven incendiary balloons from Gaza into Israel. In response, the Israel Defense Forces fired 33 shells and missiles into Gaza, striking Hamas positions, observation posts and other military infrastructure, as well as open areas. No injuries were reported.

21. On 1 October, the Israel Defense Forces arrested two Palestinian men who had crossed into Israel through the Gaza security fence, carrying a home-made bomb. On at least 76 occasions, Israeli security forces opened warning fire towards Gaza in the areas adjacent to the perimeter fence, with no injuries recorded. On 42 occasions, Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians fishing off the coast of Gaza, injuring one.

22. On 20 October, the Israel Defense Forces announced that they had located a Hamas tunnel entering Israeli territory from the southern Gaza Strip. Palestinian militants responded by firing a rocket from Gaza towards Israel, which was intercepted by the Iron Dome system. The Israel Defense Forces responded by striking an underground structure in an agricultural field in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

23. On 15 November, Palestinian militants fired two rockets towards Israel from Gaza. One rocket fell into the sea near the city of Ashdod and the other landed in an open area inside Israel, east of Ashdod. No injuries or damages were reported. In retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces fired three shells and two missiles at Hamas underground infrastructure and military posts in Gaza. No injuries were reported.

24. On 21 November, Palestinian militants fired a rocket towards Israel from Gaza, which landed on an empty factory warehouse in Ashkelon, causing damage. An Israeli woman was injured while seeking shelter. In retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces fired a shell targeting a military observation post in Gaza. A few hours later, on

22 November, the Israel Defense Forces fired 16 missiles targeting Hamas military sites. No injuries were reported.

25. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, on 22 September, during a security operation in Hebron, Palestinian Authority police used live fire and physical force against Palestinian civilians, namely one adult and three children, one aged 14 and two aged 16. The three children were seriously injured, two by live ammunition. Despite court orders to release the injured children, the four were detained until 7 October, when they were released without charge.

26. On 4 October, Israeli security forces shot and injured a 16-year-old Palestinian child during clashes in Beit Ummar village, north of Hebron.

27. On the same day, in the town of Hizma, north-east of Jerusalem, Israeli security forces shot and injured a 15-year-old boy in the head with live ammunition.

28. Also on 4 October, a Palestinian armed with a knife attempted to stab an Israeli security forces officer near Hebron. The attacker was arrested and no injuries were reported.

29. On 5 October, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man and injured two others at a checkpoint south-east of Tulkarm. Israeli security forces stated that the three were throwing Molotov cocktails at passing vehicles.

30. On 9 October, Israeli security forces injured two Palestinians with live bullets during clashes in the Old City of Hebron (H2 zone).

31. On 11 October, during a search operation in al-Am'ari refugee camp in Ramallah, Israeli security forces shot and injured 10 Palestinians with live ammunition and a further 13 with rubber-coated metal bullets. One member of the Israeli security forces was injured by a stone thrown by Palestinians.

32. On 14 October, two Israel Defense Forces soldiers were injured by an explosive device thrown at them during an arrest operation in the Balata camp for Palestine refugees, in Nablus.

33. On 25 October, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy died during an encounter with Israeli security forces near the occupied West Bank village of Turmus'ayya, near Nablus. There are conflicting claims about the circumstances and the cause of death.

34. On 27 October, nine Palestinians, including two brothers of a Palestinian Legislative Council member reportedly affiliated with the Fatah Democratic Reform Bloc, were arrested by the Palestinian Security Forces in al-Am'ari refugee camp, following clashes with camp residents.

35. On 30 October, Israeli soldiers opened fire on a Palestinian vehicle travelling near Jenin, injuring three children. The circumstances surrounding the incident remain disputed, with the Israel Defense Forces claiming that the vehicle posed a threat.

36. On 31 October, a leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade died and four Palestinians were injured during clashes between police and local residents in the Balata refugee camp. The Palestinian Security Forces reportedly intervened to disperse a family dispute. According to the Palestinian police, the individual died from a self-inflicted injury, an account disputed by the victim's family.

37. On 4 November, an off-duty officer in the Palestinian Security Forces, who according to the Israel Defense Forces shot towards Israeli soldiers, was shot dead near Huwwara, south of Nablus.

38. On 8 November, a Palestinian man who reportedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack near Hebron was shot and injured by Israeli security forces, who subsequently arrested him.
39. On 11 November, Israeli security forces injured a 16-year-old Palestinian with two live bullets, near the village of Azun Attmet, in Qalqilya, while the child was attempting to cross the barrier into Israel for work.
40. On 13 November, Israeli security forces shot and injured a Palestinian with live ammunition and shot and injured two others with rubber-coated metal bullets during security operations conducted in several neighbourhoods of Ramallah.
41. On 17 November, a 15-year-old boy returning from school lost his right eye after being hit by ricochet ammunition in Qalandia refugee camp as clashes were taking place between Israeli security forces and residents of the camp. The boy was not involved in the clashes.
42. On 23 November, an Israeli driver lost control of his vehicle after it was hit by stones thrown by Palestinians near Yitzhar junction, south of Nablus, causing an accident with a truck that injured four Israeli civilians.
43. On 25 November, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man near a checkpoint east of Jerusalem after he accelerated his car while his documents were being checked. One Israeli soldier was slightly injured after being hit by the car.
44. On 27 November, during protests in Kafr Qaddum, west of Nablus, Israeli security forces shot a 16-year-old in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet.
45. On 28 November, in Silwad, north of Ramallah, Israeli security forces shot and seriously wounded a 16-year-old with live ammunition to the chest. According to eyewitnesses, the boy was attempting to cross the street, where Israeli security forces had been responding to stone throwing. In a similar incident on 29 November, Israeli security forces shot another 16-year-old boy with live ammunition to the chest, reportedly without warning, in the context of a stone-throwing incident. Both boys were admitted to intensive care with serious injuries; one remains hospitalized and the other is under medical supervision.
46. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), during the reporting period, Israeli security forces conducted 994 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrest of 847 people, including 29 children, and the injury of 79 during subsequent clashes.
47. At least 56 of those operations, including house raids and arrests, took place in the volatile neighbourhood of Al-Issawiyah in East Jerusalem, where tensions remain high. Combined with recurring clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, some 109 people, including at least 13 children, were arrested, and one person was injured.
48. During the reporting period, arrests of Palestinians, including children, increased once again. As at 30 September, 4,184 Palestinians, including 157 children, were in Israeli custody. Of those, 376, including two children, were being held in administrative detention without charge or trial.
49. Settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank continued. OCHA recorded 78 attacks by Israeli settlers and others against Palestinians, resulting in 42 injuries and damage to Palestinian-owned properties. Palestinians perpetrated 83 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the occupied West Bank, resulting in 15 injuries and damage to property, according to Israeli sources.
50. Many settler-related incidents were also recorded in relation to the annual olive harvest. Since the start of the harvest season on 7 October, 26 harvesters have been

injured, over 1,700 olive trees have been burned or otherwise damaged and large amounts of produce have been stolen by Israeli settlers. In a few incidents, Israeli security forces intervened in clashes between Palestinians and settlers, including by shooting tear gas canisters and rubber bullets, injuring olive harvesters and forcing them to leave the groves. Some Palestinian farmers also face daunting challenges to access olive groves located behind the separation barrier or in the vicinity of settlements, which requires special permits or prior coordination from the Israeli authorities. Despite the easing of some procedures in the context of COVID-19, access to those areas continued to be impeded.

51. On 22 October and 1 November, respectively, Israeli security forces raided a non-governmental organization in Beit Hanina and a youth centre in the Shuafat area of East Jerusalem. The directors of both entities were briefly detained and, in the case of the Elia Association for Development and Volunteerism in Beit Hanina, its offices were closed for a week.

52. The Israeli authorities continued to summon, arrest and issue bans, including travel bans, to Palestinian Authority and Fatah affiliates, including the Palestinian Authority Governor of Jerusalem, Adnan Geith, and Fatah Secretary in Jerusalem, Shadi Mtour.

53. Human rights defenders and peace activists also continued to be targeted for arrest by authorities on all sides. During the reporting period, Israeli security forces detained five Palestinian human rights defenders and activists, all of whom except one remained in detention as at 10 December. In addition, one female journalist was placed under administrative detention. The Palestinian Authority detained a journalist for one month; shortly after being released on bail on 27 October, he was arrested by Israeli security forces and he remains in detention. On 26 October, a military court in Gaza convicted and eventually released three activists who had been detained in April 2020 for having organized a “normalization activity” with Israeli youth.

54. During the reporting period, Hamas-controlled courts in Gaza handed down eight new death sentences, three of which were ordered by military courts against civilians convicted of collaboration with Israel.

55. On 21 October, the Ministry of Justice of Israel announced that a border police officer might stand trial for reckless homicide, pending a hearing, for killing Eyad Hallaq, a Palestinian man with disabilities, on 30 May in East Jerusalem. On 28 October, the Supreme Court of Israel reduced the sentence from 15 to 11 years of an Israeli citizen convicted of manslaughter for the killing of a Palestinian on 27 September 2004.

#### **IV. Incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric**

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

57. During the reporting period, some Palestinian officials continued to use inflammatory and provocative rhetoric. An animated video shown on the official television channel of Hamas in Gaza portrayed and glorified Palestinians shooting and stabbing Israeli civilians and security forces in Jerusalem.

58. Israeli officials also made provocative and inflammatory statements. Some continued to reject the prospect of Palestinian statehood, calling for settlement expansion and praising demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures in the occupied West Bank. An Israeli politician called Saeb Erekat an “anti-Semite” and a “supporter of terror”, and criticized other Israelis who expressed their condolences following his death from COVID-19.

## V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

59. In resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that were imperilling the two-State solution. While there were some positive developments during the reporting period, a number of negative trends overshadowed them.

60. Beginning in early September, Fatah and Hamas embarked on a series of discussions to agree on a programme of reconciliation and the holding of the first Palestinian general elections since 2005. From 22 to 24 September, Fatah and Hamas held bilateral discussions in Istanbul, Turkey. Fatah subsequently announced that it had reached a series of understandings with Hamas, including an agreement to hold legislative and presidential elections under a proportional representation system. On 1 October, the Fatah Central Committee formally endorsed the understandings. From 16 to 18 November, Egypt hosted delegations from Hamas and Fatah to assist the parties with resolving outstanding differences. On 22 November, a senior Fatah official stated that the talks had not succeeded in securing an endorsement of the Istanbul understandings owing to disagreements over the timing of elections. Both sides have pledged to continue talks.

61. On 17 November, the Palestinian leadership announced its decision to resume security and civilian coordination with Israel and accept the clearance revenues Israel collects on its behalf, which amounted to some \$900 million.

62. Palestinians and Israelis faced immense socioeconomic impacts from COVID-19, with rising infection numbers continuing to pose grave risks to both populations. The situation remained particularly worrisome in Gaza, where the capacity of the health-care system is limited. The shortage of medical supplies in the health system in Gaza remains critical. In October, some 45 per cent of essential medicines were at zero stock, while the lack of oxygen generators at the European Gaza Hospital hindered the provision of health care to persons with COVID-19.

63. Health partners indicated that COVID-19 also had a negative impact on access to essential care, especially for remote communities in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Humanitarian partners continued to support the Palestinian Authority’s response, including through the procurement and delivery of testing kits and other laboratory and medical supplies. Prior to the resumption of coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, the United Nations had assumed emergency responsibilities to facilitate humanitarian imports and patient transfers from Gaza. With coordination having resumed, United Nations agencies rapidly began transferring those responsibilities back to the appropriate Palestinian and Israeli authorities.

64. While the mortality rate from COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained relatively low by global standards, the necessary measures taken to contain the pandemic – recurrent lockdowns and travel restrictions, school closures, the reduction of commercial activities and mandatory quarantines and isolation periods – have severely undermined living conditions. On 9 October, initial findings from a

survey implemented in partnership with the United Nations country team indicated that the pandemic had led to large declines in monthly household incomes.

65. About 42 per cent of Palestinian households reported earning less than half of their regular monthly income from March to May. Households also reported urgent need for cash support and job creation, while economic stresses translated into deteriorating social conditions. The Women's Affairs Centre in Gaza and other gender-based violence service providers across the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported an increase in gender-based violence and significant challenges in delivering services in response. As at September, OCHA had reported 24 femicide cases in 2020, equal to the total for 2019. Suicides and attempted suicides in Gaza also rose over the same period, with 24 people, including four women and five children, reportedly having taken their own lives, as compared with 22 for all of 2019.

66. On 10 November, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process issued a socioeconomic report that introduced several proposals to build confidence among the parties and address more effectively the pandemic and its socioeconomic impacts. The report included recommendations to both sides, the United Nations and its partners. The Special Coordinator encouraged Israel to take steps towards improving and backstopping the finances of the Palestinian Authority for the duration of the emergency; to grant permits to some 10,000 workers from Gaza to work in Israel and the occupied West Bank once adequate health precautions were in place; to stimulate economic growth by easing dual-use restrictions for imports into the Gaza Strip; and to grant construction permits in Area C of the occupied West Bank.

67. The Special Coordinator urged the Palestinian Government to pay deferred government salaries, repay loans issued by the Palestinian financial sector and align its expenditures with the recommendations made by the World Bank and the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in June, including for a single basic income support scheme. In addition, the Special Coordinator recommended that the Palestinian Government accelerate its trade procedures, especially with respect to the Gaza Strip, and take steps to increase commerce and trade exiting Gaza.

68. With respect to the United Nations and its international partners, the Special Coordinator indicated the need to focus support on the inter-agency humanitarian response plan, as well as the socioeconomic response plans of the United Nations country team and the Palestinian Authority. The report highlighted other initiatives that could be implemented with significant donor support, including the provision of 20,000 jobs in Gaza for 12 months, the acceleration of critical infrastructure projects in the water, sanitation, energy and health sectors, and support for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

69. Reconstruction and repair of damage incurred during the 2014 conflict in Gaza continued at a slow pace owing to the pandemic and a lack of funding. To date, 9,566 of the 11,000 totally destroyed houses have been rebuilt, including 157 during the reporting period. The reconstruction of an additional 639 houses is under way. There remains a funding gap of \$32 million to complete the reconstruction of 638 destroyed houses and \$75 million for the repair of 56,000 partially damaged homes. Over 760 families (4,000 individuals) have been internally displaced for more than five years.

70. On 27 September, 2 November and 24 November, the Egyptian authorities exceptionally opened the Rafah crossing in both directions for a total of 10 days, allowing 8,526 people to exit Gaza and 3,876 to return. All departing individuals were subject to a COVID-19 test as per the instructions of the Gaza Ministry of Health.



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

71. In resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

72. On 28 October, the Governments of Israel and the United States of America announced that they had amended three bilateral science, agriculture and technology agreements, allowing United States funds to be directed for the first time to Israeli research projects in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.

73. On 19 November, the United States announced new guidelines requiring all products exported to the United States from Area C of the occupied West Bank to be labelled as “Made in Israel”.

74. Also in resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called upon all parties to continue, in the interest of the promotion of peace and security, to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process and urged in that regard the intensification and acceleration of international and regional diplomatic efforts and support aimed at achieving, without delay, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. The Council underlined that it would not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

75. On 24 September, the ministers for foreign affairs of Jordan, Egypt, France and Germany met in Amman. They urged Israel and the Palestinians to engage in “credible dialogue” to restore “hope” to the peace process and stressed “the urgency of the resumption of serious, meaningful and effective negotiations on the basis of international law and agreed parameters directly between the parties or under the United Nations umbrella”.

76. On 25 September, in his statement to the General Assembly, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, called for the convening of an international conference in early 2021 to “engage in a genuine peace process, based on international law, United Nations resolutions and the relevant terms of reference, leading to an end to the occupation and the achievement by the Palestinian people of their freedom and independence within their State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the 1967 borders.”

77. On 29 September, 19 October and 19 November, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the latest developments on the ground and agreed to remain engaged on the matter and to chart a way forward.

78. On 18 October, Israel and Bahrain established formal diplomatic relations, signing eight bilateral agreements, including a joint communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic, peaceful and friendly relations. The communiqué affirmed that the two parties would “continue their efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive and enduring resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

79. On 23 October, the leaders of the United States, Israel and the Sudan announced that the Governments of Israel and the Sudan had agreed to end the state of belligerence between their countries and normalize relations.

## VII. Observations

80. I remain deeply troubled by continued Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which further undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, continues to encroach on Palestinian land and natural resources, hampers the free movement of the Palestinian population and increases the risks of violent confrontation. Over the past year, the Israeli authorities have advanced controversial settlement plans that had been frozen or delayed for years. These planned construction projects are located in areas crucial for the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. In total, some 50 per cent of the units advanced over the past year were located in outlying areas, deep in the occupied West Bank.

81. Overall, since the adoption of Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), settlement planning and construction have continued. Over the past four years, plans for more than 28,000 units were advanced or approved in Area C and East Jerusalem settlements and tenders were announced for some 12,000 units. On the ground, the construction of more than 6,000 new units began in Area C during the same period.

82. Despite an eight-month pause in settlement advancements in Area C during 2020, recent steps brought the total number of housing units advanced since the beginning of the year to close to 2019 levels. While advancements in Area C declined by 1,400 units in 2020, tender announcements more than doubled to 1,700. In addition, plans for some 3,500 units in the strategic location of E1 were opened for public objections, a step which had been delayed for eight years and which brings construction at the sensitive site closer to implementation. If implemented, the E1 plan would sever the connection between the northern and southern West Bank, significantly undermining the chances for establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State as part of a negotiated two-State solution.

83. In East Jerusalem, while the number of units advanced decreased from 1,000 housing units in 2019 to 700 in 2020, the number of units tendered rose from 600 in 2019 to some 1,700 in 2020. This included a tender for some 1,200 units establishing a new settlement in Givat Hamatos, which, if built, would further disconnect East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and the southern West Bank.

84. I reiterate that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. Settlements entrench the Israeli occupation and undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent and viable sovereign Palestinian State. I urge the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

85. I remain deeply concerned by the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures, which have included internationally funded humanitarian projects, including schools. I call on the Israeli authorities to end the demolition of Palestinian property and the displacement and eviction of Palestinians and to approve plans that would enable these communities to build legally and address their development needs.

86. I remain gravely concerned about the continuing violence, attacks against Israeli and Palestinian civilians and incitement to violence that exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and that drive us further from a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The violence must stop and all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable.

87. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence. I reiterate that children should not be the target of violence or put in harm's way. They should be afforded special protection from any form of violence and only detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

88. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. The Israeli and Palestinian authorities must carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

89. I am deeply concerned by the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad or others, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Palestinian militants must cease this practice immediately.

90. I am deeply concerned at the continued settler-related violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I reiterate the 5 November call by United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory for the Israeli authorities to abide by the obligations of Israel under international law to protect Palestinians from violence by Israeli settlers and to ensure that farmers can access their land freely and safely.

91. I would like to reiterate that the fate of two Israeli civilians who suffer from mental illness and the bodies of two Israel Defense Forces soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remains an important humanitarian concern. I call upon Hamas to release them, as required by international humanitarian law.

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

93. I am alarmed by the continued arrest of human rights defenders and peace activists. The Israeli and Palestinian authorities have an obligation to respect freedom of expression, association and assembly, and to facilitate and promote an enabling environment for civil society to function in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, without discrimination.

94. I also express concern that courts in Gaza continue to hand down death sentences in violation of Palestinian law and the international obligations of the State of Palestine, and call upon Hamas in Gaza to impose an immediate moratorium on executions and to cease the use of military tribunals to try civilians.

95. The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a serious concern. UNRWA is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees, but also critical for regional stability. Sufficient funding is essential for the Agency's continuity.

96. The Palestinian Authority's decision to restart civilian and security coordination with Israel and to resume receipt of its clearance revenues and the confirmation by Israel that existing bilateral agreements continue to govern relations between both parties are welcome developments. It would be important to use the transfer of six months of accumulated clearance revenues to provide critical stimulus to the economy, through the payment of partially deferred salaries and an increase in support to households and enterprises, and to allow the Palestinian Authority to address the COVID-19 emergency more effectively.

97. A comprehensive basic income support scheme developed by the Palestinian Authority would allow Palestinians to protect their institutions and banking sector and to address the COVID-19 crisis more effectively, which is urgently needed.

98. I encourage Israelis and Palestinians to re-envisage their economic and administrative relationships going forward, in line with United Nations recommendations. A revised model would not only have humanitarian, economic and developmental benefits, but would also further the prospect of resumed negotiations to help build a sustainable peace. In the absence of an active peace process, bilateral talks have proven fruitful in the past and could be restarted. I call on the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to engage in such discussions.

99. I remain seriously concerned about the fragile situation in Gaza and the immense suffering of its people. The risk of a major escalation remains. I reiterate that no amount of humanitarian or economic support on its own will address the challenges in Gaza. These ultimately require political solutions and the political will to pursue them.

100. Taking into consideration its legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ease the restrictions on the movement of goods and people to and from Gaza, with the goal of ultimately lifting them. Only by fully lifting the debilitating closures, in line with Security Council resolution [1860 \(2009\)](#), can we hope to sustainably resolve the humanitarian crisis. I also call on Hamas and other militant factions to end the military build-up, including the construction of tunnels into Israel, and to cease the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars towards Israeli civilian population centres, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

101. It is regrettable that agreement has not yet been reached on the holding of long-overdue Palestinian presidential and legislative elections. I encourage the parties to continue efforts to overcome outstanding differences in line with Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts.

102. I urge Israelis, Palestinians, regional States and the broader international community to take practical steps to enable the parties to re-engage. The Special Coordinator is actively engaged in advancing these efforts. Such steps must also be accompanied by concrete actions to restore a legitimate political horizon to end the conflict. The Middle East Quartet, key Arab partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders must work together to return to the path of meaningful negotiations.

103. I hope that recent developments will encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations, with the support of the international community, and will create opportunities for regional cooperation. As we have seen in statements from around the world, the commitment to the two-State solution, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law, continues to be affirmed by broad regional and international consensus.

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

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