



Security Council

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Implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the twentieth quarterly report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). The reporting period is from 29 September to 9 December 2021.

II. Settlement activities

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

3. On 4 and 18 October and 8 November, the Civil Administration of Israel held discussions on objections to two settlement housing plans for a total of nearly 3,500 units in the strategic E1 area in the occupied West Bank. If the objections are rejected, the plans will be two steps short of final approval. If implemented, the plans would sever the connection between the northern and southern parts of the occupied West Bank, hindering the possibility of establishing a viable and contiguous Palestinian State.

4. In mid-October, construction of a new residential compound in the Jewish settlement in Hebron began. The project, totalling 31 housing units, was approved and budgeted by previous Governments of Israel and is the first new construction project in the settlement in over a decade.

5. On 24 October, the Israel Land Authority announced tenders for some 1,350 settlement housing units. About half are in the settlement of Ari'el, at the heart of the northern West Bank, and would significantly expand the built-up residential area westwards, with serious implications for future Palestinian development in the area. The announcement included the reissuance of tenders from January for some 80 units in the settlement of Giv'at Hamatos in occupied East Jerusalem. Construction in this



area would further consolidate the ring of settlements, potentially severing the link between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

6. On 27 October, the High Planning Committee of Israel advanced plans for 3,100 housing units in Area C, some located in outlying settlements, including 600 units in Eli, 300 in Bracha and 200 in Talmon in the West Bank.

7. On 28 October and 1 November, Israeli authorities advanced plans for 6,000 housing units for Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Issawiya and 1,300 housing units for Palestinians in Area C.

8. At a session held on 6 December, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee discussed a controversial plan for some 9,000 housing units in Atarut, near Qalandiya, between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Following the session, during which representatives from several government ministries presented opposing views on the plan, the Committee stated that, while the plan would utilize unused land reserves in an appropriate manner, it could not be advanced before the completion of an environmental impact survey, which is expected to delay the advancement process by roughly one year.

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, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced people to demolish 166 structures, resulting in the displacement of 106 people, including 44 children and 34 women, and leaving 5,495 others affected.

10. A total of 56 per cent of the structures were demolished or seized with no or very short prior notice based on military order 1797, which authorizes an expedited process for the demolition of unauthorized “new structures” in Area C and gives owners 96 hours to demonstrate possession of a valid building permit. Another 20 structures were demolished by their owners following receipt of demolition orders. A total of 30 structures demolished or seized were donor-funded.

11. On 29 September, the High Court of Justice of Israel granted a request by the State of Israel to postpone to March 2022 its response to a petition to implement eviction orders against the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in Area C. In the request, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the “current diplomatic-security situation” were cited as reasons for the postponement, and it was added that there had been “significant progress” towards an agreement to avoid demolition.

12. On 25 October, in Hammat al-Maleh, in the northern Jordan Valley, Israeli authorities confiscated structures, including a classroom and a medical clinic serving five adjacent Bedouin and herder communities. Some 50 children were affected.

13. Overall, in occupied East Jerusalem, at least 218 Palestinian households comprising 970 people, including 278 women and 424 children, are subject to eviction cases in Israeli courts. Most cases were initiated by Israeli settler organizations and are based on the application of Israeli laws that allow for properties in East Jerusalem that were owned by Jews prior to 1948 to be reclaimed. No similar law allows Palestinians to reclaim their property in Israel.

14. On 4 October, the Supreme Court of Israel presented a proposal to four Palestinian families who were seeking to appeal a lower court ruling authorizing their eviction from their homes in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Shaykh Jarrah. The proposal would postpone their eviction, while requiring them to pay nominal annual rent to the settler corporation seeking to evict them. The Court specified that the agreement would not prejudice ongoing legal proceedings to determine ownership of the properties, but until a legal determination is made, the Palestinians would be

recognized as protected tenants and the settlers as owners of the plots. The four families rejected the Court's proposal on 2 November, while the settler corporation also reportedly raised reservations. The Court had previously announced that, if the parties did not accept its proposal, it would issue a ruling on the pending appeal of the Palestinian families.

15. On 28 November, the Jerusalem District Court rejected an appeal against the demolition orders issued against 58 homes, affecting around 500 people, in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, placing them at risk of demolition and eviction.

III. Violence against civilians, including acts of terror

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

17. The reporting period was characterized by daily violence throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, high levels of settler-related violence, attacks and alleged attacks by Palestinians against Israelis and the use of lethal force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians.

18. Overall, throughout the reporting period, 10 Palestinians, including one woman and 4 children, were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations and other incidents across the occupied Palestinian territory, and 1,085 Palestinians, including five women and 141 children, were injured, including 16 by live ammunition and 830 by tear gas. In addition, 34 Palestinians were injured by Israeli settlers or other civilians, who also perpetrated 104 attacks resulting in damage to Palestinian property. In total, 1 Israeli civilian was killed and 31 Israelis – 26 civilians and five members of Israeli security forces – were injured by Palestinians in clashes, shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks, as well as incidents involving the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails and other incidents.

19. Israeli forces conducted 114 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in 510 Palestinians arrested, including 36 children. Many children reported ill-treatment and breaches of due process by Israeli forces while in detention, with some reporting physical violence. On 23 November, the Israel Security Agency announced that it had exposed a network of some 50 Hamas operatives in the West Bank who, according to the Israeli authorities, were preparing attacks against Israelis.

20. Near nightly confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and Israeli civilians, including settlers, occurred around Damascus Gate in October, as Israeli forces fired tear gas canisters, stun grenades, rubber bullets and skunk water, while Palestinians threw stones and other objects. Some 64 of the total Palestinian injuries over the reporting period occurred in the context of these events. On 9 October alone, 17 Palestinians were injured by rubber-coated bullets and stun grenades fired by Israeli forces, while one Israeli police officer and one Israeli child were injured by stone-throwing.

21. Across the occupied West Bank, clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians continued. On 5 November, a 13-year-old Palestinian child from Nablus was shot and killed by Israeli forces during a clash near the Elon More settlement, east of Nablus. About 842 Palestinians were injured, including 1 by live ammunition, 133 by rubber-coated metal bullets and 708 by tear gas, in clashes that took place during the weekly

demonstrations against settlements in and around Bayta and Bayt Dajan in Nablus Governorate, and Kafr Qaddum, near Qalqilyah.

22. On 30 September in the Old City of Jerusalem, a Palestinian woman allegedly tried to stab Israeli police officers, who shot and killed her. On the same day, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in the village of Birqin in the northern West Bank. Israeli forces said that the man had fired at Israeli soldiers as they were conducting an arrest operation. Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed him as one of their members.

23. On 14 October, Israeli forces shot and killed a 14-year-old Palestinian boy and wounded another after they allegedly threw Molotov cocktails at civilian vehicles west of Bethlehem. On the same day, a Palestinian man drove his vehicle into an Israeli soldier and injured him near the Qalandiya checkpoint. Israeli forces fired on the vehicle and injured and arrested the driver.

24. On 16 November, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man during a search operation and subsequent clashes in Tubas. Israeli authorities stated that Palestinians had fired shots and thrown an improvised explosive device towards Israeli soldiers, who had returned fire. Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed the man as one of its members.

25. On 17 November, a 16-year-old Palestinian stabbed and injured two Israeli security forces personnel in the Old City of Jerusalem. He was subsequently shot – first by an Israeli civilian, believed to be a settler, and then by Israeli security forces – and killed. According to eyewitness accounts, the perpetrator was being restrained by the Israeli security forces when he was first shot by the civilian, while Israeli police stated that they were struggling with the boy when he was shot. The civilian has not been arrested.

26. On 21 November, a Palestinian man shot and killed an Israeli civilian and injured two others in the Old City of Jerusalem. Israeli forces killed the attacker. Two Israeli security personnel were also lightly injured in the incident. Hamas claimed the attacker as a member of its political wing.

27. On 4 December, a Palestinian man attacked an Israeli civilian and a police officer with a knife in the Old City of Jerusalem and was killed after being shot multiple times by Israeli security forces. Footage shows the man being shot and subdued on the ground before Israeli forces shot him twice again, apparently killing him.

28. On 6 December, a 15-year-old Palestinian boy reportedly carried out a car-ramming attack against Israeli security forces at the Jubara checkpoint near Tulkarm and was subsequently shot and killed by the security forces. An Israeli security forces officer was seriously injured in the incident.

29. On 8 December, a 14-year-old Palestinian girl reportedly stabbed and injured an Israeli civilian woman in the Shaykh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. The girl and her female friend were arrested and are currently in detention. Both have denied all charges.

30. Settler violence and violence between Palestinians and Israeli settlers and other civilians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, intensified during the reporting period in the context of the annual olive harvest and continued settlement expansion.

31. On 28 September, some 70 Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian villages of Um Faggarah, Rakeez, and Tuwani in the south Hebron hills. A total of eight Palestinians were injured, including a three-year-old child, who suffered a critical head injury. The settlers also killed livestock and damaged homes and infrastructure.

In related clashes, 20 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were injured. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Yair Lapid, condemned the attack and said that Israel had “a responsibility to bring [the attackers] to justice”. Israeli authorities arrested at least six Israelis in relation to the incident, as well as three Palestinians. While four of the Israelis were released on 1 October, two Israeli children, a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old, were indicted on 21 October for participating in the attack.

32. Many settler-related incidents were recorded in relation to the annual olive harvest. Since the start of the harvest season on 4 October, at least 38 incidents have been recorded, in which 11 Palestinian harvesters were injured, and over 3,300 olive trees were damaged or had their harvest stolen. Harassment, theft and vandalism were also reported. Some Palestinian farmers also faced challenges in accessing olive groves located behind the separation barrier or in the vicinity of settlements, which requires Israeli approval.

33. On 28 September, Israelis from the Yitzhar settlement attacked employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross with pepper spray during a visit by the Committee to olive groves in Burin, south of Nablus. Israeli forces subsequently provided an escort and first aid. Israeli police have launched an investigation.

34. On 10 November, Israeli settlers erected a tent in Khalleyt Athaba’ in southern Hebron. Although Israeli forces dismantled the tent, settlers returned to erect it again and Palestinians reportedly threw stones at them. The settlers shot live ammunition at the Palestinians and set a Palestinian tent on fire. Five Palestinians were injured, and five Palestinian vehicles, including two ambulances, sustained damage.

35. Between 16 and 28 November, Israeli security forces and armed settlers repeatedly attacked Palestinian school students and residents in Lubban al-Sharqiyah, Nablus. The attacks included physical assaults and the use of stun grenades, tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets. At least 83 Palestinians, including 75 students, were injured.

36. On 24 November, a Palestinian man and his 10-year-old son were injured near Al-Mughayer as three men in an oncoming car, who, according to witnesses, appeared to be settlers, threw a large object towards their vehicle, which subsequently overturned. As at 9 December, the man remained in a coma. The incident is under investigation.

37. In Gaza, on 30 September, Israeli forces shot and killed a Palestinian man near the perimeter fence. The Israel Defense Forces stated that he had been carrying a suspicious bag, but relatives of the man disputed this, saying that he was hunting.

38. In Ramallah, 10 hearings were held in the trial against 14 members of Preventive Security Forces accused of killing the critic of the Palestinian Authority and former parliamentary candidate, Nizar Banat.

39. On 22 October, the Ministry of Defence of Israel announced the designation of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as terrorist organizations. It subsequently accused them of constituting “an inseparable arm” of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Israel Defense Forces subsequently extended the applicability of the designations to the occupied West Bank through military orders on 7 November. According to Israeli legislation, members of a designated terror organization or any individual who provides material or other support could be criminally prosecuted and imprisoned.

IV. Incitement, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric

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

41. On 5 October, tensions in the Old City of Jerusalem escalated after the Jerusalem Magistrate Court granted the appeal of a Jewish Israeli who was expelled from the Holy Esplanade for praying there. The decision was condemned by Palestinian, Muslim and Christian leaders and by countries in the region as a violation of the status quo. Israeli police appealed the decision to the Jerusalem District Court, which swiftly reversed the Magistrate Court's decision on 8 October, reinstating the appellant's temporary visitor ban. In response, the Minister of Public Security of Israel reiterated that "the status quo must be observed", adding that any change to the existing arrangements "would endanger public safety and could cause a flare-up". Tensions escalated further after Israeli authorities began construction work on a public park near the Yusufiya Islamic cemetery adjacent to the Old City, in particular after human remains were unearthed on 10 October. A petition by the Islamic Waqf to stop the construction was rejected by an Israeli court on 25 October and the work resumed.

42. Some Palestinian Authority and Fatah officials made remarks denying the Jewish connection to Jerusalem or its holy sites. Fatah social media pages and some Palestinian Authority and Palestine Liberation Organization officials continued to glorify perpetrators of attacks against Israeli civilians. Hamas welcomed and celebrated attacks, including a shooting in the Old City in which an Israeli civilian was killed.

43. Some Israeli officials made racist statements against Arabs and Palestinians. One member of the Knesset repeatedly called Israeli Arab members of the Knesset "terrorists", using derogatory language, and separately threatened to ascend to the holy sites with an Israeli flag. Another member of the Knesset called members of the Knesset from the predominantly Arab joint list "enemies" and "terror supporters" and said that they were in Israel "by mistake" because the first Prime Minister of Israel "did not finish the job and did not throw [Israeli Arabs] out in 1948".

V. Affirmative steps to reverse negative trends

44. In its resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the Security Council called for affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends on the ground that were imperilling the two-State solution. Negative trends persist, despite some positive developments during the reporting period.

45. On 17 November, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians met in Oslo at the ministerial level and addressed the fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority, the humanitarian and development situation, the need to maintain the fragile calm in Gaza and the fragility across the occupied Palestinian territory. As expressed in the Chair's summary, the meeting called for support for a package of recommended steps for the parties and the donor community focused, inter alia, on progress on outstanding fiscal files and economic and fiscal reforms, as well as other measures such as enhanced trade and the movement of persons and workers, aimed at boosting the Palestinian economy. As Chair of the Committee, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway welcomed the

“practical attitude” during the meeting, while urging participants to “translate this attitude into real change”.

46. At the same time, stepped-up engagement between some senior Israeli and Palestinian officials continued. On 4 October, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, met with two Israeli ministers (the Minister of Health, Nitzan Horowitz, and the Minister for Regional Cooperation, Isawi Frej) and a member of the Knesset from the Meretz party. The Minister of Finance of the State of Palestine and Mr. Frej met on 16 November in connection with the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. Additional interministerial contacts also continued, including technical-level discussions about a meeting of the Joint Economic Committee, expected to take place early in 2022.

47. The entry of goods and material into Gaza increased compared with the previous reporting period. Volumes of imports for October and November through the Kerem Shalom crossing were 10 per cent higher than the monthly average before the escalation in May, with the share of construction material increasing significantly. Similarly, import volumes through the Rafah crossing also reached one of the highest levels since the beginning of the year. Exports from Kerem Shalom, however, recorded a decrease of 9 per cent over the average monthly exports in the previous reporting period.

48. Following the destruction resulting from the escalation in May, about 8,500 internally displaced people in Gaza remain with host families or in rented accommodation. To date, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Development Programme have provided transitional shelter cash assistance to about 1,500 households.

49. The United Nations has launched reconstruction efforts for severely damaged housing units, but around 13,000 partially damaged units are still in need of urgent repair. Preparations for the reconstruction of around 1,000 of the 1,600 totally destroyed homes have begun with assistance from Qatar and after the lifting of some restrictions on the entry of construction materials by Israeli authorities.

50. In October, Israeli authorities announced that the total number of permits for Gaza traders would be expanded to 10,000, the highest number in years. To date, around 9,000 have been issued. On 7 November, for the first time, 500 permits were announced for Palestinians in the West Bank working in the high-technology sector. On 19 October, Israel also announced the approval of West Bank residency status for 4,000 Palestinians.

51. During the reporting period, the approval rate for permits for patients from Gaza requiring medical referrals for treatment outside the Gaza Strip reached a three-year low, with just 54 per cent of applications approved in September and 61 per cent in October.

52. On 19 October, to mark the twenty-first anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in partnership with the General Union of Palestinian Women, brought together Palestinian women and young people in Gaza for a national dialogue on women and peace and security. The event served as a platform for Palestinian women and the international community to reflect on the implementation of the resolution in the occupied Palestinian territory. Participants highlighted the vital role that Palestinian women can play in national reconciliation and peacebuilding processes.

53. On 5 November, Israel began to provide water to Gaza through the new Bani Sa'id connection point, allowing it to increase the amount of water that it sells to

Gaza by 5 million cubic meters per year, as agreed between the parties. The increase in the supply of potable water will reduce the pressure to dig new wells into the aquifer, as well as improve the average quality of the water provided through the municipal water network.

54. In November 2021, for the second consecutive year, UNRWA ran out of funds to sustain its essential services until the end of the year. At the international ministerial conference co-hosted by Jordan and Sweden on 16 November, additional funds were pledged, leaving a \$60 million shortfall to cover all services until the end of the year. Consequently, UNRWA was compelled to defer the payment of November salaries to over 28,000 United Nations teachers, doctors, nurses and other staff until 8 December. UNRWA currently lacks the funds to cover its operations in December and will also carry over important liabilities into 2022, further worsening its financial situation.

55. The Central Election Commission of Palestine finalized preparations to conduct the first phase of local council elections in the occupied West Bank. On 11 December, Palestinians voted in competitive elections for 165 local councils in communities with populations between 4,000 and 8,000 people.

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

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

57. On 16 November, the Government of Belgium agreed that future treaties between Belgium and Israel would contain the European Union territorial clause stipulating that the treaties do not apply to territories brought under Israeli control after 1967. It also agreed, inter alia, that it would tighten controls on goods entering from Israel with a view to determining whether they could be treated preferentially or not, on the basis of European Union trade agreements with Israel, depending upon their place of origin.

58. On 6 December, the European Union and Israel concluded an agreement associating Israel to Horizon Europe, the European Union flagship programme for research and innovation. The agreement replicates a provision from the previous European Union-Israel association agreement (2014–2020), in which it is stated, inter alia, that “in accordance with European Union policy, this agreement shall not apply to the geographic areas that came under the administration of the State of Israel after 5 June 1967”.

59. In its 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 within the time frame specified by the Quartet in its statement of 21 September 2010. The Council 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.

60. On 14 October, the Middle East Quartet envoys, from the European Union, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the United Nations, held their regular virtual monthly meeting. On 17 November, they met on the margins of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Oslo. In a joint statement, the Quartet expressed its concern regarding negative developments across the occupied Palestinian territory, including ongoing acts of violence in the West Bank, the advancement of new settlement units, the untenable fiscal crisis within the Palestinian Authority and threats of violence from the Gaza Strip. The Quartet also highlighted the need to take constructive steps to advance a two-State solution and called on all parties to help to address the current urgent challenges through fiscal and other reforms, as well as by avoiding unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undermine the prospects for peace.

VII. Observations

61. I remain deeply concerned by the significant acceleration of Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and by the continued consideration and advancement by Israel of plans that had been frozen or delayed for years in highly controversial areas that are crucial for the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, including the E1 area, Atarut and Giv'at Hamatos. Settlements further entrench the Israeli occupation, undermine the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty, encroach on Palestinian land and natural resources, hamper the free movement of the Palestinian people and increase the risk of violent confrontation.

62. The promotion of plans and tenders for housing units in settlements continued during 2021. While the number of plans advanced in Area C declined in 2021 for a second year in a row, with a total of 4,000 housing units – a sharp drop from the 8,400 units advanced in 2020 – the number of tenders announced in 2021 spiked to 3,300, nearly double that of 2020. In East Jerusalem settlements, the number of housing units advanced also declined for a second year, from some 700 units in 2020 to 550 in 2021. However, the strategically located Har Homa E plan was advanced and, if implemented, would help to create a contiguous built-up area of Israeli settlements along the southern perimeter of occupied East Jerusalem. Similarly, the announcement of tenders for East Jerusalem settlements declined sharply in 2021 to some 300 units, compared with 1,700 in 2020, but 80 were in the sensitive area of Giv'at Hamatos.

63. I call on Israel to put a stop to all settlement activities immediately. Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution by systematically eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous, independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State.

64. I am extremely concerned by the significant rise in settler-related violence against Palestinians and their property. In 2021, settler violence resulting in injury and/or property damage reached its highest level since 2017. So far in 2021, 5 Palestinians have been killed by live ammunition by settlers, while 583 have been injured in settler-related violent incidents, the highest figure recorded in five years. I am particularly disturbed by reports of armed settlers carrying out attacks inside Palestinian communities, sometimes in the proximity of Israeli security forces, and of Israeli forces attacking Palestinians alongside settlers. Settlers are rarely held accountable for these attacks, increasing the level of threat to Palestinians and their property. Attacks continue despite reports of some steps being taken by the Israeli

authorities to address the issue. Israel, as the occupying power, has an obligation to protect Palestinians and their property there.

65. I remain deeply concerned by the continued demolitions and seizures of Palestinian structures, which have included internationally funded humanitarian projects. For the second consecutive year, demolitions are approaching the worrying level of 2016, which was the highest since the United Nations began systematically recording them in 2009. As at 6 December, the Israeli authorities had demolished 835 Palestinian structures for lack of building permits in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In 2020, and now in 2021, there was a 40 per cent increase over the average annual rates of demolition over the past decade. The number of people displaced so far in 2021 is 1,044, the highest since 2016. Israeli authorities are increasingly using military orders in Area C to execute demolitions or confiscations without, or with very little, prior notice, further limiting opportunities for legal recourse. In 2021, 56 per cent of the structures demolished or confiscated were the result of military orders, compared with approximately 30 per cent between 2018 and 2020.

66. I welcome the advancement of plans for some housing units for Palestinians in the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Issawiya and in Area C, which include some pre-existing units that will no longer be subject to demolition. I urge Israel to continue to regularly advance such plans and to issue building permits for all previously approved plans for Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to help to meet critical housing needs.

67. I remain disturbed by the possible eviction of some Palestinian families from their homes in the Shaykh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of occupied East Jerusalem. I call on the Israeli authorities to end the demolition of Palestinian property and the eviction and displacement of Palestinians, in line with the country's obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law and to approve plans that would enable those communities to build legally and address their development needs. Demolitions and forced evictions entail numerous human rights violations and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer.

68. I remain gravely concerned by the continuing violence, terrorist attacks and incitement to violence against civilians, which exacerbate mistrust and undermine a peaceful resolution to the conflict. I reiterate that the violence must stop, and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

69. I am particularly appalled that children continue to be victims of violence, arrested in large numbers and held for prolonged periods of time, including in military detention. So far in 2021, at least 341 Palestinian children have been arrested in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem – more than double the number in the same period in 2020. Equally disturbing is the fact that many of these children report persistent patterns of ill-treatment during arrest and detention as well as lack of due process. I reiterate my call for Israel to uphold international juvenile justice standards, including the use of detention as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and to end the administrative detention of children and prevent all forms of ill-treatment in detention. I reiterate that children must never be the target of violence or put in harm's way.

70. I am troubled that there are serious concerns that Israeli security forces use disproportionate and excessive force against Palestinians, in particular by using live ammunition, resulting in deaths and injuries. In 2021, in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli security forces killed 72 Palestinians, including 17 children, and injured at least 1,047 others with live ammunition compared with 23 Palestinians killed and 154 injured by live ammunition in 2020. The spike notably occurred in the context of increased clashes during the period comprising the

escalation in Gaza in May. I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only as a last resort, when it is strictly unavoidable, in order to protect life. Israel must carry out thorough, independent, impartial and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

71. The fate of two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two Israel Defense Forces soldiers held by Hamas in Gaza remain an important humanitarian concern. I call on Hamas to provide information on their status, as required by international humanitarian law.

72. I also remain concerned by the continued Israeli practice of holding the bodies of killed Palestinians, totalling 91, including 1 woman and at least 9 children. I call on Israel to return withheld bodies to their families, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

73. I remain concerned by the multiple instances in which officials used dangerous and hateful rhetoric with the potential to raise tension and spark violence. Terrorism, violence and incitement must be clearly condemned and unequivocally rejected by all, never celebrated or amplified.

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

75. I am concerned about the shrinking space for civil society in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel designated six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations, several of which receive a significant portion of their funding from Member States. The legal implications of the designation are wide-ranging and add to increasing pressures on civil society organizations across the occupied Palestinian territory. Since the Israeli announcement, the United Nations has continued to engage with Israeli authorities, the designated NGOs and donors to obtain more information about the allegations and their implications.

76. I am also concerned by the increase in restrictions by Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. So far in 2021, Israeli security forces have arrested 64 people in relation to the exercise of those rights, including 19 human rights defenders. This raises serious concerns of arbitrary detention. In occupied East Jerusalem, organizations were searched or closed, and events prevented from taking place on the basis of allegedly conducting activities sponsored by the Palestinian Authority, an act criminalized under Israeli law. Meanwhile, Palestinian security forces have detained at least 101 people, including 10 women, seemingly in relation to their exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly, expression and association; the number also includes at least 11 human rights defenders, 4 of whom are women. 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.

77. I note that, while the trial for the killing of Nizar Banat is ongoing, members of his family have been subjected to threats, house raids, arrest and detention, raising concerns that they are being intimidated. I appeal to the Palestinian authorities to ensure the protection of members of the Banat family and of witnesses in the case. I call on the Palestinian authorities to put in place measures to ensure that freedom of expression is protected.

78. The deterioration of the security and socioeconomic situation across the occupied Palestinian territory is worrying. It is essential that the parties avoid unilateral steps, reduce flashpoints and violence across the occupied Palestinian territory, solidify the cessation of hostilities and support economic development in

the Gaza Strip. Concerted efforts by the parties are required to maintain calm, strengthen Palestinian institutions and restore hope, or there is a risk of plunging into another deadly escalation of violence.

79. The Palestinian Authority is facing a financial crisis. Economic figures for 2020 and forecasts for 2021 and beyond demonstrate the gravity of the situation. In 2020, per capita gross domestic product declined by 13.5 per cent in the occupied West Bank and by 15 per cent in the Gaza Strip. I was encouraged by the engagement between Israeli and Palestinian officials, including at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Oslo. However, more significant steps by all parties are urgently needed to shore up the economic and institutional stability of the Palestinian Authority, including through the implementation of necessary reforms.

80. I urge Member States to continue and to increase their valuable support to UNRWA to safeguard access to critical basic services for the millions of refugees serviced by the Agency. UNRWA remains indispensable for regional stability and must have the resources necessary to fulfil its mandate.

81. I note that the security situation in Gaza remains fragile. For any durable stability, movement into and out of, and access to and from, Gaza must be further improved, including access for Palestinian workers to the Israeli labour market and supply lines of medical goods, relevant equipment and materials, while taking into account security concerns in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Only by fully ending the debilitating closures in line with the resolution can there be hope that the humanitarian crisis will be sustainably resolved. I reiterate that the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism remains best placed to enable the entry and accountable delivery of items and materials for projects and private sector development. While constructive measures initiated during the reporting period are encouraging and welcome, further steps are required to meet the needs in Gaza.

82. It is critical that Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts continue. The United Nations stands firm in its support for the efforts of Egypt in this regard. I call on all Palestinian factions to redouble efforts to ensure the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, under a single, democratic, national government. Gaza is, and must remain, an integral part of a future Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution.

83. It is essential to follow through on verbal commitments with concrete actions that will demonstrate the collective resolve to achieve a two-State solution. I urge Israelis, Palestinians, regional States and the broader international community to take practical steps that will enable a return to the path leading towards meaningful negotiations and, ultimately, peace. The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process is actively engaged in advancing these efforts with his counterparts in the Middle East Quartet, key regional partners and Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

84. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis in resolving the conflict and ending 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 shared capital of both States.

85. I express my deep appreciation to the Special Coordinator, Tor Wennesland, 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.