



Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

9584th meeting

Friday, 22 March 2024, 9 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Yamazaki	(Japan)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador	Mr. De La Gasca
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Israel to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2024/239, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States of America.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): For all the stories that have been written about divisions in the Council — and there are many real divisions — I believe most of us share many of the same goals. First and foremost, we want to see an immediate and sustained ceasefire as part of a deal that leads to the release of all hostages being held by Hamas and other groups and that will allow much more lifesaving humanitarian aid to get into Gaza. Of course, we cannot just want that to happen, we have to make that happen. We have to do the hard work of diplomacy. I know members have heard me say that a lot, and that is because it is the truth.

A Security Council resolution means much less if it is not actually made real on the ground. That is why the United States, Egypt and Qatar are working around the clock in the region to secure an immediate and sustained ceasefire as part of a deal that leads to the release of all hostages being held by Hamas and other groups — one that will help us address the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We believe that we are close. We are not there yet, unfortunately. And this moment is one in which the Security Council has a critical role to play. By adopting the draft resolution before us (S/2024/239), we can put pressure on Hamas to accept the deal on the table.

Council members do not need me to tell them that every day without a deal, meaning every day without a ceasefire, leads to more needless suffering for more

than 100 hostages, including a one-year-old child, being held in captivity by Hamas and other groups; for innocent Palestinians in Gaza, who have been displaced, who are starving and who desperately need peace; and for Israelis who have continued to face missile attacks from Hamas, a terrorist group that set this conflict in motion on 7 October 2023. Every day without a deal means more needless suffering.

This draft resolution will move us closer to securing that deal and help us to alleviate that suffering, and I urge all Council Members to vote yes. I urge them to vote for a draft resolution that, at long last, condemns Hamas for its horrific terrorist attacks and sexual violence; that makes clear that all civilians — Palestinians and Israelis — should be able to live without fear of violence; that demands the protection of civilians in Gaza and stresses that a major ground offensive into Rafah poses a grave threat to civilians, even as we still work towards eliminating Hamas from all parts of Gaza; that calls on Israel to eliminate all barriers and restrictions to humanitarian aid, especially as the threat of famine looms large in northern Gaza; that condemns calls to resettle Gaza and makes clear that the Palestinian Authority should have ultimate authority over Gaza; and that reiterates the Council's support for a two-State solution. This is a strong draft resolution. It is the by-product of exhaustive and inclusive negotiations. It reflects the consensus of the Council, and it does more than just call for a ceasefire — it helps to make a ceasefire possible. It would be a historic mistake for the Council not to adopt this draft resolution, and I again urge all Council members to vote yes.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For six months now, the Security Council has been unable to adopt a draft resolution demanding a ceasefire in Gaza. All attempts were repeatedly thwarted by the opposition of the United States, which, in cold blood, used its veto in this Chamber on four occasions. In that time, we have heard a series of excuses from our American colleagues. Either they said that it was premature to seek a ceasefire because it was necessary to give space to Israel's so-called counter-terrorism efforts, or they demanded that the Council not interfere with Washington's "effective diplomacy on the ground", or they asked for the Council to wait for Ramadan to begin, when, apparently, an agreement on ending the violence would definitely be reached.

Now, six months on, Gaza has been virtually razed to the ground, and, without batting an eye, the representative of the United States has asserted that

Washington is finally beginning to realize the need for a ceasefire. Washington's sluggish thought process has cost the lives of 32,000 peaceful Palestinians, two thirds of whom are women and children. Even now, we are witnessing a typical hypocritical spectacle, in which, under the guise of a ceasefire, the United States is trying to sell something else to Council members and the entire international community: namely, vague wording about defining the imperative for a ceasefire. Such philosophical passages about moral imperatives are at home in the works of Immanuel Kant, but they are not enough to save the lives of peaceful Palestinian civilians. And this is absolutely not the mandate of the Council, which has a unique mechanism for demanding a ceasefire and, if necessary, enforcing it.

During an official interview in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 20 March with an *Al-Hadath* correspondent, the United States Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, said

“Well, in fact, we actually have a resolution that we put forward right now that is before the United Nations Security Council that does call for an immediate ceasefire tied to the release of hostages, and we hope very much that countries will support that”.

However, there is no such call in the text of the draft resolution submitted by the United States (S/2024/239), which has been put to the vote today. So, it seems that either the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations or the United States Secretary of State have been deliberately misleading the international community.

From the very onset, it has been clear that the so-called negotiations that our American colleagues have been conducting on this issue have been aimed merely at stalling for time. All our comments and red lines have been disregarded time and again, as were the proposals from a number of other delegations. It was some kind of speaking into the void rather than a normal approach to working on a document. The American product is exceedingly politicized, and the sole purpose of it is to ride the wave of the pre-election period by throwing voters a bone in the form of at least some mention of a so-called ceasefire in Gaza, to establish the political ambitions of the United States in the region by creating terrorist labels and to ensure the impunity of Israel, whose crimes are not even mentioned in the draft resolution.

I wish to draw attention to the following. The draft resolution produced by the United States actually gives the green light for Israel to mount a military operation in Rafah. At the very least, the authors try to make it so that nothing in their draft resolution would prevent West Jerusalem from completing its brutal cleansing of the southern Gaza Strip. That is, in fact, what Washington is trying to achieve. We have already stated that we will no longer adopt pointless draft resolutions that do not contain a call for a ceasefire and lead us nowhere. This draft resolution should not be adopted by the majority of members, to send the message that Washington's not even palliative, but devious concepts are unacceptable. It would be very strange for us to see those members of the Council — who are in the majority, who understand that fact and who persuaded us of the deficiencies of the United States draft resolution — to now raise their hands to vote in favour of it.

If members do so, they will cover themselves with shame. Consider once again: how will members be seen by the people of the Middle East and by their own people, if they support this hypocritical initiative, which is designed to disorient the international community and, essentially, to undermine the Council's authority, ensuring that it cannot have an impact on the situation on the ground and that it does not get in the way of the White House? Are members willing to play into their hands, in this unsavoury spectacle? Russia will not do so. As a permanent member of the Council and as one of the founders of the United Nations, we recognize the historical and global responsibility we shoulder for the maintenance of international peace and security. We cannot allow the Council to become an instrument in the advancement of Washington's destructive policy in the Middle East. If this draft resolution were to be adopted, it would definitively close the door on discussions about the need for a ceasefire in Gaza. It would free Israel's hands, and it would result in all of Gaza and its entire population having to face destruction or expulsion.

We are not guided by what is convenient for Washington and its satellites, who raise their hands when told to do so by Washington. We do not follow that lead. What guides us is what is necessary for the Palestinian people and what helps to advance peace. We call upon Council members not to allow this to occur and to vote against the United States draft resolution.

For the Council to ultimately be in a position to deliver on its mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security, a number of

non-permanent members of the Security Council have produced an alternative draft resolution, which stipulates, in black and white, the demand for both a ceasefire and the unconditional release of hostages. It is a balanced and apolitical document. We see no reason for the Council members not to support it, unless a ceasefire and the release of hostages are not part of their plans. This is an attempt to allow the Council to fulfil the noble functions vested in it, and we call for members not to let this opportunity slip away.

The President: I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

Algeria, China, Russian Federation

Abstaining:

Guyana

The President: The draft resolution received 11 votes in favour, 3 against and 1 abstention. The draft resolution was not adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): Today the United States put forward a draft resolution (S/2024/239) in good faith after consulting with all Council Members and after multiple rounds of edits. The vast majority of the Council voted in favour of the draft resolution, but unfortunately, Russia and China decided to exercise the veto. And now, Russia and China will give you all sorts of explanations for their obstruction. But whether or not they will admit it, there are two deeply cynical reasons behind their votes.

First, Russia and China still could not bring themselves to condemn Hamas's terrorist attacks on 7 October. Can we just pause on that for a moment? Russia and China refuse to condemn Hamas for burning people alive, for gunning down innocent civilians at a concert, for raping women and girls, for taking hundreds of people hostage. This was the

deadliest single attack on Jews since the Holocaust, and permanent members of the Council cannot even condemn it. I am sorry — it is really outrageous, and it is below the dignity of this organ.

The second reason behind this veto is not just cynical, it is also petty. Russia and China simply did not want to vote for a draft resolution that was penned by the United States, because it would rather see it fail than see the Council succeed, even after inclusive consultations over weeks and weeks, even after negotiations and edits produced a draft that received overwhelming Council support.

And as Council members saw today, nearly every Council member voted to put the full weight of this organ behind the diplomatic efforts to secure an immediate and sustained ceasefire as part of a deal that leads to the release of all hostages that will allow much more humanitarian aid to get into Gaza.

But once again, Russia put politics over progress. Russia, which has carried out an unprovoked war on its neighbour, has the audacity and hypocrisy to throw stones when it lives in a glass house itself.

Let us be honest: for all the fiery rhetoric, we all know that Russia and China are not doing anything diplomatically to advance a lasting peace or to meaningfully contribute to the humanitarian response effort.

There is obviously another draft resolution that some Council members would like to be considered. But, in its current form, that text fails to support sensitive diplomacy in the region. Worse, it could actually give Hamas an excuse to walk away from the deal on the table.

All of us want to see the Council speak out, but we should not move forward with any draft resolution that jeopardizes the ongoing negotiations. And those are not just negotiations that are being carried out by the United States. Others in the region — Qatar and Egypt — are engaged on those negotiations. So, if that alternative draft resolution comes up for a vote and does not support the diplomacy happening on the ground, we may once again find the Council deadlocked. I truly hope that that does not come about.

For our part, the United States will keep at it. We will continue to work towards a deal alongside Qatar and Egypt. And we will work with any Council member

that is seriously interested in adopting a resolution that will help make that deal possible.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom voted yes on the draft resolution before us this morning (S/2024/239). We voted yes on the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to protect civilians, allow humanitarian aid in and alleviate suffering. We voted yes on the call for international humanitarian law to be upheld, for the release of hostages, to reject forced displacement and to urge against a ground offensive into Rafah.

Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis, which will not improve until more aid can get into Gaza. Therefore, we are deeply disappointed that Russia and China were unable to support the Council to clearly and unequivocally state the need for an immediate and sustained ceasefire to that end.

Through the draft resolution the Security Council would have rightly, and for the first time, unequivocally condemned Hamas's terrorist attacks. We are disappointed that the Council was not able to send that important message owing to the vetoes cast by Russia and China.

We welcome the patient and constructive consultation by the United States on this text.

For our part, we will continue to do everything we can to get aid into Gaza as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. But an immediate stop in the fighting is the only way to get the aid into Gaza that is so desperately needed and make progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): I address the Security Council today not only as the representative of Algeria but also as a representative of the whole Arab world witnessing the unfolding tragedy in Palestine.

Our region is devastated by the violence inflicted upon the Palestinian people. Live scenes of destruction and killing, inflicting profound suffering, are not bearable anymore.

Since the beginning of the aggression against the Palestinian people, the Group of Arab States has consistently called for putting an end to this carnage. Only by ceasing hostilities can we alleviate the immense suffering and ensure that large-scale humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. For that purpose,

last month we presented draft resolution S/2024/173, which garnered significant support within the Security Council, but it was ultimately vetoed. We firmly believe that its adoption could have saved thousands of innocent lives. There is no doubt that resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023) have fallen short due to the absence of clear demand for a ceasefire. Those who believe that the Israeli occupying Power would choose to uphold its international legal obligations are mistaken. They must abandon that fiction.

Since the circulation of this draft resolution (S/2024/239), over a month ago, Algeria has participated actively and in good faith in the negotiation process, proposing reasonable edits in order to achieve a more balanced and acceptable text. We acknowledge the efforts made by the United States delegation, especially by Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, to accommodate some of our proposals. However, our core concerns remain unaddressed, despite the many circulated revised versions.

Throughout the process, we relentlessly emphasized the urgency of an immediate ceasefire in order to prevent further loss of life. We echoed the demand of millions of people and humanitarian actors for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Regrettably, the draft resolution falls short of our expectations. It fails to adequately address those main issues and the immense suffering endured by the Palestinian people.

Over five months, the conflict in Gaza has resulted in the tragic loss of life of more than 32,000 Palestinians, with more than 74,000 injuries and 12,000 permanent disabilities. These are not mere statistics. They represent lives; they represent dreams; they represent hopes that have been destroyed. Alarmingly, the text avoids mentioning the responsibility of the Israeli occupying Power. Those individuals were not lost due to acts of self-harm. They were killed. Their perpetrators must be held accountable. For us — in the Arab world, in the Islamic nations, in the whole world — Palestinians lives undeniably matter.

The text presented today does not convey a clear message of peace. It tacitly allows for continuing civilian casualties and lacks clear safeguards to prevent further escalation. It is a *laissez-passer* to continue killing Palestinian civilians. The emphasis on “measures to reduce civilian harm from ongoing and future operations” implies a license for continuing bloodshed.

In that context, we are particularly concerned about a potential military operation in Rafah. Such an operation would have devastating consequences. Algeria, along with other countries of the region, has actively pursued reconciliation between the Palestinian factions because we trust that a united Palestine is essential for its future and the future of the peace process. We believe that specific provisions within the draft resolution jeopardize the future of the Palestinian State and hinder ongoing reconciliation efforts. Building a Palestinian State requires the collective efforts of all its citizens, and Security Council actions should support, not impede, that process.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a vital role in assisting Palestinian refugees — not only in Palestine, but also in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It is a tool of regional stability. Any resolution undermining UNRWA's mandate would exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation. The Agency's continuing operation is essential until Palestinian refugees are able to sustain themselves or to return home, as stipulated by international law.

Supporting parallel efforts to end the bloodshed should not prevent the Council from demanding a clear ceasefire to alleviate Palestinian suffering. The Security Council's duty, under the Charter of the United Nations, is to maintain international peace and security. It should be empowered to impose a ceasefire.

For all those reasons, Algeria voted against the draft resolution. We urge all Council members to prioritize an immediate cessation of hostilities. The Security Council must take decisive and meaningful action to halt the violence and pave the way for a sustainable peace process in Palestine and the wider region as well. It is still in our capacity to act, and urgently.

Mr. De Rivi re (France) (*spoke in French*): France is grateful to the United States for proposing draft resolution S/2024/239, for which we voted. The Council must continue to take action, as the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza is worsening every day. France demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and an immediate and lasting ceasefire. We therefore support the efforts of several elected members of the Council who are proposing a draft resolution along those lines, and we welcome the fact that their draft resolution expresses unreserved support for the ongoing efforts in Doha, as does France. The draft calls

for comprehensive respect for international law and the Geneva Conventions. That is an absolute requirement. France is firmly opposed to any Israeli offensive in Rafah, which can only lead to a humanitarian disaster.

There is an urgent need for delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza on a massive scale. The port of Ashdod must be opened, along with the direct land link from Jordan and all crossing points. In line with our principles, France will continue to call the Council to condemn the terrorist acts and sexual violence committed by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023. The vast majority of us supported Brazil's October draft resolution (S/2023/773), which clearly condemned those acts. But while France insists on its tireless commitment to Israel's security and its solidarity with the Israeli people following those attacks, they cannot justify the suffering to which the Palestinians have been subjected. France remains committed to a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we want to emphasize that only a two-State solution can ensure the security needs of Israel and the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for a State. It is the duty of the Council to recognize that, and that is why France will shoulder its responsibilities and propose an initiative to the Security Council.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): The Republic of Korea voted in favour of draft resolution S/2024/239, proposed by the United States, because it includes positive elements that can plant the seeds for a more sustainable peace in Palestine and Israel, including support for the ongoing negotiations to achieve the release of hostages and an immediate ceasefire. The Republic of Korea reaffirms its firm position calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, objecting to any ground operation in Rafah, and stressing the importance of the protection of civilians. We note with appreciation that the draft resolution made it clear that an immediate and sustained ceasefire is imperative if we are to protect civilians and alleviate the humanitarian suffering, and we compliment the United States Government's efforts to incorporate comments from Council members.

The draft resolution contains other important elements, including support for diplomatic efforts to ensure a ceasefire and the release of all remaining hostages, the clear condemnation of all acts of terrorism, including the deplorable Hamas-led attacks of 7 October 2023, and concern about the proposed ground offensive into Rafah. It also demands that all parties enable the full, immediate, safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to the

civilian population throughout Gaza. In addition, it rejects forced displacement and the establishment of so-called buffer zones and new settlements in Gaza, and it includes a commitment to a two-State solution. It is therefore regrettable that another opportunity for the Council to forge a favourable response has failed to reach consensus. The Republic of Korea will continue to engage constructively with other members of the Council to reach a meaningful outcome in responding to the grave situation in Gaza.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China voted against the draft resolution that has just been put to the vote (S/2024/239). I would like to explain China's position and the relevant considerations as follows.

More than 160 days have passed since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict. In the face of a human tragedy in which more than 32,000 innocent civilians have lost their lives and millions are suffering from famine, the most urgent action that the Council should take is the promotion of an immediate, unconditional and sustained ceasefire. That is the universal call expressed by the international community, the decision taken by the General Assembly at its emergency special session a few months ago (see A/ES-10/PV.45), and the solemn appeal made by the Secretary-General to the Council while invoking Article 99 of the Charter (see S/PV.9498). The Council has dragged its feet and wasted too much time in that regard.

We are all aware that the United States' introduction of its own draft resolution has come after its veto on 20 February of the overwhelming consensus among Council members on an immediate ceasefire (see S/PV.9552). Over the past month, the draft resolution has undergone several iterations and contains elements that respond to the international community's concerns, but it has always evaded and dodged the most central issue, that of a ceasefire. The final text remains ambiguous and does not call for an immediate ceasefire. Nor does it even provide an answer to the question of realizing a ceasefire in the short term. That is a clear deviation from the Council members' consensus and falls far short of the expectations of the international community. An immediate ceasefire is a fundamental prerequisite for saving lives, expanding humanitarian access and preventing wider conflicts. The United States draft resolution, on the contrary, sets up preconditions for a ceasefire, which is no different from giving a green light to continued killings, and that is unacceptable.

Many other aspects of the draft resolution are also very unbalanced. In particular, with regard to Israel's recent and repeated declarations of plans for a military offensive into Rafah, the draft resolution does not clearly and unequivocally state its opposition, which would send an entirely wrong message and lead to severe consequences.

Any action taken by the Security Council should stand the test of history and the scrutiny of morality and conscience. Based on the responsible approach of standing up for truth and justice and safeguarding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the dignity of the Council, and also based on the concerns and strong opposition of the Group of Arab States regarding the draft resolution, China, together with Algeria and Russia, has voted against the draft resolution.

The members of the Security Council have now been presented with another draft resolution, the result of collective consultations among the elected members of the Council. This draft resolution is clear on the issue of a ceasefire. It is in line with the correct direction for the Council's action and is extremely relevant, and China supports it. We hope that Council members will reach agreement on that basis as soon as possible and send a clear signal calling for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the fighting.

Like other members, China has from the outset called for the immediate release of all hostages, a demand that has been reiterated in resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). We welcome the mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar and others to that end, and we hope that all the detainees will be released as soon as possible.

China rejects the United States and United Kingdom's groundless accusations about China's voting position. If the United States was serious about a ceasefire, it would not have vetoed multiple Council draft resolutions again and again, and it would not have taken this detour and played a game of words while being ambiguous and evasive on critical issues. If the United States is serious about a ceasefire, we beg it to vote in favour of the other draft resolution's clear call for one, so that such a ceasefire can finally and immediately be achieved, the Palestinians' sufferings alleviated and ended and the hostages released without delay. At this stage, what is most important for the United States is not words but actions.

No matter what, China will continue to work with Council members and the international community to play a responsible and constructive role in order to achieve a ceasefire and put an end to the fighting, alleviate the catastrophic suffering, implement a two-State solution and promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): Malta thanks the United States for its efforts and consistent engagement on today's draft resolution (S/2024/239). Malta voted in favour of the text, and we regret that the use of the veto has prevented its adoption. We believe it would have represented another important step in the right direction and would have continued to build on resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). Malta remains firm in its position that an immediate and permanent ceasefire is the only avenue by which we can prevent a further deterioration in the situation and begin addressing the impact of the Israeli-Hamas war.

We support and appreciate the ongoing efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the United States to negotiate a deal that will enable hostages to be released. We will continue to reiterate our call on Hamas to release all of its hostages safely and unconditionally. We welcome the fact that the draft condemns the heinous Hamas terror attacks of 7 October, including the taking of hostages and the sexual violence committed. We recognize that the text emphasizes the concerns about a possible ground offensive into Rafah and the catastrophic consequences that such an offensive would have for 1.5 million people, the majority of whom are women and children. However, we underline that the Council cannot be perceived to be authorizing any ongoing or future Israeli military operations into Rafah in any way. We stress our firm rejection of any ground offensive into Rafah and believe that the draft should have had stronger and more reassuring language on the matter. We also underline the fact that a forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population from or within Gaza would amount to a grave breach of international law.

Malta continues to be seriously alarmed at the ever-increasing humanitarian toll of this war, which has persisted during this holy month of Ramadan. We firmly reiterate our call to Israel to ensure the immediate, safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of adequate aid to the people in Gaza, which is so desperately needed. We must do our utmost to alleviate the suffering of civilians there, and we also repeat our call for the full implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023) and

2720 (2023). Malta remains deeply concerned about the ongoing situation in the region. We reiterate that an immediate and permanent ceasefire remains a priority if we are to de-escalate this deeply worrying spiral of violence and regional escalation. In closing, Malta reaffirms its steadfast commitment to achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. That demands a two-State solution whereby Israel and Palestine, as two democratic States, peacefully coexist side by side within secure and recognized borders, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): After five months of war in Gaza and the horrific attacks of 7 October 2023, the Council has still not been able to adopt a text that addresses all the dimensions of the conflict in a manner that has an impact on the situation on the ground and upholds the rule of law. While Guyana welcomed the United States' initiative to develop a draft resolution and the transparency with which the negotiations were conducted, we are of the view that given the length of time spent on those negotiations and the consistent expression of certain positions by several delegations, the draft resolution (S/2024/239) could have better reflected the broad-based feedback. Guyana abstained in the voting today on the draft resolution for a number of reasons, which I will elaborate on.

First, contrary to some media and other reports, it does not call for an immediate ceasefire. Instead, we note that it "determines the imperative" for a ceasefire and calls for support for diplomatic efforts that are ongoing outside the United Nations. While those efforts must be commended, given the Council's responsibility and mandate Guyana could not support a draft resolution that does not call unequivocally for an immediate ceasefire. Nearly 32,000 people, the majority of them women and children, have been killed in Gaza since 7 October. More than 74,000 have been maimed. Initial United Nations assessments have concluded that it will take years to clear the 23 million tons of rubble and unexploded weapons scattered across Gaza. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report projects famine between now and May. In summary, this human-made disaster cannot be halted without an immediate ceasefire, and it is the Council's responsibility to demand one unequivocally, even while acknowledging the efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

Secondly, the demand for a ceasefire should not be linked to or conditional on the release of hostages. The taking of hostages is strictly prohibited under international law, and their release must be unconditional. Guyana reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Two wrongs cannot make a right, and the Palestinian people should not be collectively punished and themselves held hostage for the crimes of others.

Thirdly, in our view, the draft text today lacked attribution in a number of key areas. While it includes a condemnation of Hamas for the 7 October attacks and demands that they immediately grant humanitarian access to the hostages — and rightly so — it provides no attribution to the Israeli authorities regarding what is taking place in Gaza or demands on them. For example, who is responsible for the fact that 1.5 million Palestinians have taken refuge in Rafah, and who has announced a planned military ground offensive there? To whom is the demand for compliance with obligations under international law regarding the protection of civilians and civilian objects, humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian relief and medical personnel, their assets and infrastructure applicable? Who has erected and maintained the existing barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance at scale? Who is responsible for the forcible displacement of the civilian population in Gaza? Who is preventing the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip? Who does not respect deconfliction and notification mechanisms?

We know the answers to those questions. We have heard briefer after briefer, both from the United Nations system and civil society, describe the situation on the ground, explaining where the problems are and who is responsible for creating them. Why, then, were the relevant demands in the draft resolution not clearly addressed to the occupying Power? Not even once was that done. Indeed, if one were to read this draft resolution without background knowledge, it would be difficult to ascertain which party in this conflict is committing the atrocities in Gaza — atrocities that necessitated this draft resolution being put forward. In a draft resolution of 41 paragraphs, 2,036 words, the occupying Power is mentioned once, in the penultimate paragraph.

Fourthly, preambular paragraph 7 was of particular concern to Guyana. The Council is the organ with the Charter responsibility for addressing threats to peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression.

How can we endorse the idea of “ongoing and future operations” in Gaza as long as measures are taken to “reduce significantly civilian harm”. That idea was rejected by several delegations during the course of the negotiations. In Guyana’s view, it is in direct contravention of the Council’s responsibility. It would set a dangerous precedent and make the Council complicit in the atrocities being committed in Gaza now and in the future.

Fifthly and finally, we took note of the four paragraphs dealing with the mandate of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza. While we applaud the Coordinator’s efforts, we are of the view that the scale of efforts that would be required in Gaza after the war would warrant a key role for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), given its decades of experience in the Strip and its capacity vis-à-vis other agencies operating there. The Council has heard many times of the indispensability of UNRWA. It is the lifeline for Palestinians. We were therefore disappointed that the only mention of UNRWA in the draft resolution pertained to the investigations into the allegations against a small number of its staff. Guyana, supported by several delegations, had requested an affirmation of UNRWA’s important mandate in the text, but that was not taken on board.

The Council still has an opportunity to take action to end the suffering of all parties. Civilians in Gaza need a respite. Palestinians need a respite. Israelis need a respite. Both need a respite from the continuous cycle of violence and pain. That is the real window of opportunity — the strong desire of the people of Palestine and Israel for peace. Guyana is prepared to work with other Council members to respond to their needs and legitimate aspirations, including, very importantly, the two-State solution. That must not be postponed.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): A month after our previous vote (see S/PV.9552), I will repeat my words: we voted in favour of the draft resolution (S/2024/239) because the killing and starving of civilians in Gaza must stop, and the suffering of hostages and their families must end. We voted in favour of the draft resolution because we believe it is imperative for the Security Council to send a clear message that the situation in Gaza is unacceptable.

We deeply regret the use of the veto by the Russian Federation and China. We thank the United States for its efforts on this draft resolution. The draft resolution offered the Council an opportunity to follow up on several harrowing briefings that we have received in the past month. The draft resolution did not include all the elements that we would have wanted to see in the text. However, it provided us an opportunity to express ourselves on a number of particularly concerning aspects of the crisis in Gaza, and they include: the importance of achieving an immediate and sustained ceasefire; the need to release hostages; a clear stance against an offensive in Rafah and its serious implications for regional peace and security; the urgency of removing roadblocks to humanitarian assistance, including the need for the increased provision and distribution of humanitarian aid; the need for the respect of international law and the protection of civilians and civilian objects; the need for the protection of humanitarian relief and medical personnel; the rejection of an attempt at a territorial or demographic change of Gaza, including forced displacement; and the commitment of the Council to the vision of the two-State solution.

Many of those elements have been extensively elaborated during numerous meetings and briefings on Gaza. As emphasized on those occasions, we believe in the complementarity of all efforts — bilateral, regional and those of the Council. We therefore once again thank the leaders of Egypt, Qatar and the United States for their efforts in securing a deal on the ground. Slovenia is of the view that a strong signal of support from the Council for the negotiations on the ground could give the process important impetus and bring us closer to lasting peace.

We continue to condemn Hamas's terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 and call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. Hamas did set this in motion, but it did not have to end with more than 32,000 Palestinians killed, the rest of them starving and massive violations of international humanitarian law. War, with all its tragic consequences, is a choice, not a necessity.

We underscore the need for accountability and adherence to international law, and we would like to once again express our deep concern about the statements of Israeli officials regarding resettlement of the people of Gaza and reject the possible ground invasion in Rafah.

We regret that the Council has once again been unable to send a clear signal of the need for this conflict

to end in order to then continue its work on the political solution and the vision of the two-State solution. We reiterate our call for full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice and resolutions 2712 (2023) and 2720 (2023). The Council must demonstrate leadership in the pursuit of peace. Slovenia will continue its engagement with all Council members to find a united voice from the Council. For Slovenia, Palestinian lives matter. For us, Israeli lives matter. This conflict must end.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland voted in favour of the draft resolution submitted by the United States of America (S/2024/239) and regrets that it was not adopted owing to the veto of two permanent members of the Security Council.

In the light of the unbearable suffering on the ground, the Council should have achieved a tangible result and sent a signal of its capacity for action and clear unity in support of the protection of civilians. All Council members contributed to the many consultations on the text put to the vote today, and I thank the United States for its efforts. However, right up to the end, Switzerland argued for its content to be brought closer to the clear and concrete request made repeatedly by a very large majority of Council members for the implementation of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire without any preconditions. It is high time that an unequivocal request for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire be agreed by consensus within the Council.

In view of the catastrophic humanitarian situation in which civilians — primarily children — find themselves in Gaza, the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons at the mercy of the bombardments, and the risk of famine and epidemics, such a ceasefire remains an extremely urgent priority step. Humanitarian aid, which the entire population of Gaza needs today, must be provided quickly, safely and without hindrance. We note that the United States text does not explicitly call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages — a demand that a large majority of Council members, including Switzerland, have consistently made since the acts of terror perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October. Switzerland welcomes, on the other hand, the condemnation of those acts in the text.

Finally, Switzerland remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian consequences of the current hostilities. A large-scale military offensive in Rafah would

significantly worsen the already catastrophic situation of the civilian population and create a new major obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Such a prospect is unacceptable and cannot be endorsed by the Council.

Today's failure should under no circumstances be interpreted as a message for the parties to continue the hostilities. For that reason, Switzerland will remain committed, including with the elected members of the Security Council, to facilitating rapid action by the Council. We encourage all the negotiation efforts undertaken by the United States, Egypt and Qatar and thank them for those efforts.

It also remains our duty to ensure that the obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law, be respected by all parties under all circumstances, even in the absence of Council resolutions, in order to protect and assist civilian populations.

Switzerland will remain committed to unified action aimed at bringing the conflict to an end and re-establishing a political horizon, in line with our mandate to maintain peace and security.

Mr. Sowa (Sierra Leone): Today the Security Council considered the draft resolution presented by the United States (S/2024/239) as part of the Council's efforts to fulfil its responsibility to honour the Charter of the United Nations and to maintain international peace and security.

We acknowledge the time and effort dedicated by United States to ensure that we had a draft resolution that could address the current situation on the ground as it relates to the ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip since the attack of 7 October.

Despite the serious difficulties we have with some provisions of the text, Sierra Leone voted in favour of the draft resolution to demonstrate commitment to achieving a sustainable cessation of hostilities, even if incremental in approach and dependent on diplomatic negotiations outside of the United Nations.

The text placed before the Council by the penholder did not call for an unambiguous, immediate ceasefire and an unconditional release of the hostages. With the unfolding catastrophe, tragic and massive scale of killings and human suffering in Gaza, Sierra Leone has committed to supporting initiatives that will lead to a ceasefire. Our vote therefore was informed by the need to support actions that could lead to an immediate and

sustained ceasefire, alleviate human suffering, stop forced displacement of Palestinians and allow for the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, including medical supplies, water, food, bedding and shelter. Our vote is also indicative of the urgent need for all hostages held by Hamas to be immediately released.

With our vote we underscore the urgent need for expanded and unimpeded humanitarian assistance to civilians in the entire Gaza Strip, especially at this critical moment of acute food insecurity in the Gaza Strip and imminent risk of famine.

As a firm proponent of consistency in complying with international law, Sierra Leone welcomes the call for parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, with regard to the conduct of hostilities and the protection of civilians and civilian objects.

While we regret that the current text was not adopted owing to the incorporation of elements that could be misinterpreted and which lacks the Council's consensus, that setback notwithstanding, as a Council, we must continue our pursuit of peace.

Our quest for a solution to the ongoing catastrophic humanitarian situation is to rescue the 17,000 unaccompanied children in the Gaza Strip, more than 1.4 million internally displaced persons, the wounded, women and other vulnerable groups from untimely deaths and untold suffering.

Sierra Leone will continue to recognize the key role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and all United Nations humanitarian agencies in providing life-saving assistance to the civilian population and offer its support to the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza.

When the guns are silent and we are at the critical point, it is our firm view that the people of Palestine should be given the liberty to determine their political status and future. We emphasize that all engagements regarding reconstruction of the Gaza Strip must be conducted in good faith and with the active participation of the Palestinians.

Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ecuador voted in favour of the draft resolution that we have just considered (S/2024/239) because we share the sense of urgency for the Council to act in the face of the catastrophic humanitarian situation of the Palestinian

civilians in Gaza on the brink of famine and with the risk of the spread of violence to other locations, which could also have catastrophic consequences.

We voted in favour of a draft resolution that is the result of a lengthy negotiation process in which all members of the Council participated. It is above all a draft resolution that contains not only the Council's determination that an immediate ceasefire is required, but also other elements of considerable importance, relevance and urgency, including in the medium and long term, with a view to achieving a lasting peace. The text also includes an explicit condemnation of the Hamas terrorist attacks and the taking of hostages. Ecuador reiterates the demand that the hostages be released immediately unconditionally.

I am convinced that each of us, each member of the Council, believes that the text could be improved upon. But I am also fully convinced that we would never agree on which part needs to be improved upon or how to do it. In such a complex situation, a perfect text for everyone is impossible.

The Council must not be hostage to political rivalries. It should be a space for building reconciliation and peace, in the framework of a mandate clearly established in the Charter of the United Nations. Therefore, I once again regret that a majority decision of the Council has not been respected owing to the use of the veto.

The President: I shall make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Japan.

Over five months have passed since Hamas's horrifying acts of terror took place in Israel, which has led to the unfolding of the tragedies the world has been witnessing in Gaza. At least 32,000 Palestinians have been reported to be killed by Israel in Gaza, most of them women and children. The population is on the brink of famine, and the looming Israeli military offensive into Rafah only threatens to deepen the humanitarian catastrophe. That should not proceed under any circumstances.

Given the gravity of the situation on the ground, Japan voted in favour of the draft resolution (S/2024/239). We deeply regret that it failed to be adopted.

Japan appreciates the tireless efforts of the United States in consulting with all Council members throughout the negotiation process.

Had it been adopted, the draft resolution could have pushed forward ongoing, vigorous diplomatic efforts, in particular the four-party talks, towards an immediate and sustained ceasefire and the release of hostages. We believe that this would be a pragmatic approach to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Although we were unable to adopt the draft resolution, the Council must put pressure on the parties to conclude a deal as soon as possible. Those in Gaza and beyond cannot wait another day.

I resume my functions as President of Council.

The Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We just now listened to hypocritical statements from a number of members of the Council, shedding crocodile tears over the Russian and Chinese vetoes. We explained the reasons why we did not allow the adoption of draft resolution S/2024/239. By no means is it because it was put forward by the United States delegation, as its representative asserted today. I told all of those who voted here today that they would be covering themselves with disgrace if they voted for the American text, which was unacceptable for everyone, including those who are now praising it.

Shall I tell the Council what really happened? It is not difficult to see, as the scenario is not at all complicated. The American overlords, in addition to twisting the arms of their leaders in the capitals, told them not to worry because the Russian Federation would veto the draft resolution anyway, but that they should not go against the American text. That is it; that is the whole scenario. There is no need for them, here and now, to hypocritically tell us how disappointed they are that Russia and China vetoed the draft resolution. I say again that today they have covered themselves with disgrace by voting in favour of a text that they themselves did not and do not actually support.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Erdan (Israel): I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the United States of America. The United Nations was established in the wake of the Holocaust to prevent such atrocities from happening again. I thank Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield for defending those values. Her determination to condemn

the Hamas monsters and her conviction that the release of the hostages is not something that can be postponed, shows true moral clarity. The American draft resolution (S/2024/239), had it been adopted, would have marked a moment of morality for the United Nations — a place where good is evil and justice is injustice. It would have been the very first time that the Council or any United Nations entity, condemned Hamas and its brutal massacre. Yet sadly, for purely political reasons, the draft resolution did not pass, and terrorists can continue benefiting from the Council whitewashing their crimes.

How can we explain to children around the world that the organ mandated to uphold global peace and security refuses to condemn terrorists for the most horrific crimes? The Council's decision to not condemn Hamas is a stain that will never be forgotten.

As Israel defends its very future against those that seek our annihilation, all United Nations entities have dedicated their discussions only to the situation in Gaza and the civilian casualties. Numbers supplied by the terrorists are thrown around and quoted as if they were the word of God. Yet, in essence, those numbers are merely the lies of Hamas, which the United Nations is so quick to parrot.

The time has come to put an end to that myth. Hamas knows that it cannot defeat Israel militarily. Its goal is to annihilate Israel, and its strategy is to terrorize our civilians while weaponizing the international community to tie our hands in order to ensure their survival. And how do they do it? They use Gazans as human shields in an effort to maximize civilian casualties, knowing that it will lead the Council to pressure Israel into ending the military operation. Please remember that for Israel, every civilian death is a tragedy. For Hamas, civilian deaths are a strategy. And sadly, the Council is playing into Hamas's strategy — exactly as it predicted.

Israel is a law-abiding democracy. We take every effort to minimize collateral damage. Israel has gone above and beyond to ensure the safety of civilians. We drop warning leaflets, make tens of thousands of phone calls and provide Gazans with military maps detailing safe corridors. Israel has taken steps that no other military in any other conflict has ever taken — all in order to mitigate civilian casualties. Hamas, on the other hand, for years built hundreds of miles of terror tunnels, in which terrorists hide and our hostages are held. Why did Hamas do it? Hamas does this precisely in order to

exploit Gazan civilians as human shields and to increase the death toll.

For Hamas, more murdered civilians is key to their survival. It is their path towards a ceasefire that will keep them in power. Everyone should ask themselves whether they are helping advance Hamas's strategy. Through the Gaza Ministry of Health that it controls, Hamas provides false statistics, which are then parroted around the globe promoting the lies of terrorists. By merely looking at the Hamas numbers, it is crystal clear that they cannot represent reality. A statistics professor from Wharton School of Business, recently released an analysis of the Gaza Ministry of Health data, with numbers, proving that the figures are not only distorted, but also inflated. They have no possible basis in reality.

But even if we were to take Hamas's falsified numbers at face value, the non-combatant to combatant ratio in Gaza is roughly one to one. That is the lowest ratio in the history of urban warfare. Every civilian death in Gaza, as I said, is tragic, but the only party to blame is Hamas. Yet the Security Council refused to hold Hamas accountable for deliberately putting Gazans in the line of fire. Condemn the tunnel under schools, condemn the exploitation of hospitals for terror, hold Hamas accountable. The same can be said about the libellous narrative of famine in Gaza. That too is Hamas propaganda, which the United Nations has chosen to embrace. Israel places absolutely no limit on humanitarian aid entering Gaza. To date, 341,000 tons of aid — on more than 18,283 trucks — have entered the Gaza Strip. Any country that wishes to provide more aid is more than welcome to do so, and we will facilitate its entry. The only reason why any Gazan lacks aid is because Hamas loots it and steals much of it. As long as Hamas is in control, Gaza's economic situation will be in ruins.

The Council has expressed its concern over an operation in Rafah, but let me be clear — no country seeks to avoid an operation in Rafah more than Israel. Whose sons and daughters are being sent into battle? It is our children who are making the ultimate sacrifice in defence of their homeland. From the outset of the war, Israel's goal have been clear — return the hostages, dismantle Hamas's terror capabilities and ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel.

So far, Israel has succeeded in dismantling roughly 18 Hamas battalions, but there are four remaining battalions in Rafah, with around 8,000 terrorists. Israel is fighting for its future, and if we fail to achieve our

goals, Hamas will repeat 7 October again and again — as it promised publicly. That applies not only to Hamas, by the way — terror will prevail in our region, which will inspire jihadi organizations all across the globe.

The only way to achieve a real and permanent ceasefire is to eliminate Hamas capabilities entirely. And that cannot happen unless all of their battalions are demolished. One cannot extinguish a fire by putting out most of it. The fire will grow again and spread. That is what will happen without an operation in Rafah. Israel sees no alternative. The road to a permanent ceasefire passes through Rafah. If the Council has any other ideas how to dismantle the terror group without entering Rafah, we would love to hear them. We are open.

Once Hamas's key capabilities are dismantled, Israel's goal of demilitarizing Gaza can materialize. But for a lasting solution between Israel and Gaza, there is another requirement — deradicalization. According to a recent poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey — the Palestinian Centre's research — 71 per cent, I repeat, 71 per cent of Palestinians support Hamas's 7 October massacre. It is not just a minister saying this or that, as has been said here. The fact is that 71 per cent of the Palestinian people support the massacre and more than 60 per cent of Palestinians want to see Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip. Can the Council comprehend that? The vast majority of Palestinians support Hamas's massacre and want to keep these rapists and murderers in power.

That is the root of the problem. Anyone who ignores that deep-seated hatred and makes demands of Israel, and only Israel, is burying their head in the sand like an ostrich, just as the United Nations has done since Israel disengaged and withdrew from Gaza in 2005. For 18 years the United Nations has turned a blind eye to Hamas's bigotry, incitement and radical indoctrination to terror, which are rampant in schools across Gaza, including schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We hear calls for two States and for peace, yet the United Nations refuses to address the underlying issue. The vast majority of Palestinians are not looking for peace. What is most important to them is Israel's annihilation at any cost. That is why deradicalization is key. When one-sided demands are made on Israel without any demands on Palestinians to end their culture of hate and incitement, a long-term solution will never be possible. The Council should demand that the Palestinian Authority combat terror, end incitement, stop paying salaries to terrorists and deradicalize the people. The educational transformation that the German people underwent after the Third Reich

was toppled is what the Palestinians need to receive so that they can finally support coexistence — coexistence with Jews, coexistence with Israel. That is how we educate our children.

The war may be in Gaza, but it extends much further than our battle against Hamas. As every Council member is well aware, the true puppet master directing Hamas, Hizbullah and the Houthis — all of them — to attack us and their militias is Iran. Iran is the architect of instability and its ambitions for world domination must be stopped. The ayatollah regime is determined to wipe Israel off the map and is not ashamed to say it publicly.

Tomorrow the Jewish people will celebrate the holiday of Purim, which represents a very important message to the murderous ayatollah regime and the rest of the world. Around 1,500 years ago in Persia, which is modern-day Iran, the king signed a disastrous decree calling for the annihilation of all the Jews in his empire. Following that catastrophic decision, the Jewish people banded together, and through conviction and faith succeeded in reversing that resolution, gaining the right to self-defence. As a result, they defeated all who set out to murder them, and the man behind the evil plot was executed. That is the story of Purim, our holiday, and the holiday's watchword is "and the opposite happened". The people who plotted against the Jews saw their own schemes turned against them. That is the essence of Jewish history. We have carried the very same faith and conviction that the Jews of Persia displayed with us to this day. That is why we have survived and thrived despite all of the decrees and racist decisions taken against us throughout history. Many have tried to destroy us, but all have failed, because we will never surrender and we will always fight for our existence.

The members of the Council called for a ceasefire in honour of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan. We respect Ramadan, but Hamas's massacre was carried out on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, the holiday on which we mark the completion of the reading of the Old Testament, the Torah. So today, in honour of Purim, the request of the Jewish people is that the Council take real and active measures to release all of our hostages, and if we are successful, if the hostages return home and Hamas is dismantled, then just as it says in the Megillah, the text that we read on Purim, "The Jewish people had light and joy, gladness, happiness and honour for us and all humankind".

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.