



Statement

by

**H.E. Dr. Nawaf Salam
Permanent Representative of Lebanon
to the United Nations**

**at the
Security Council open debate**

**on
The situation in the Middle East,
including the Palestinian question**

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Mr. President,

As the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza enters its 50th year, the following words of the late Palestinian Poet, Mahmoud Darwish, resound more than ever:

“The Palestinians are the only nation in the world that feels with certainty that today is better than what the days ahead will hold. Tomorrow always heralds a worse situation.”

Mr. President,

It has been now almost half a century that the Palestinians have had that certainty ingrained in their minds.

Needless to remind you that for the Palestinians the situation on the ground has kept deteriorating for five decades, with daily violations of their basic rights, including countless killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, confiscation of their private property, demolition of their homes and forcible displacement. And as days, weeks, months and years pass by, more Israeli settlements are built on occupied Palestinian territory, thus rendering the prospects for a just, comprehensive, and durable peace, based on the principle of a two-state solution, less and less attainable.

Amidst this grim reality, the latest breakthrough achieved with the adoption of Security Council resolution 2334 must be welcomed.

Regrettably, and in reaction to the adoption of this resolution, we have also witnessed Israeli inflammatory rhetoric and hatred towards the UN and the international community, denouncing a so-called “bias” and “disproportionate” number of resolutions against Israel.

However, the only disproportionate matter here is the number of years the Palestinian people have been waiting for the implementation, yet to come, of tens of UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions recognizing their legitimate aspirations of ending the occupation and their right to live - like other peoples of the planet - in an independent and viable State of their own.

There is no whatsoever “bias”, Mr. President, when UN resolutions recall, year after year, Israel’s lack of compliance with its obligations under the Charter and international law. As a matter of fact, UNSC Resolution 2334 mainly reaffirms (and let me underline, Mr. President, “reaffirms”) what has emerged for many years, as a consensus within the international community:

Israeli settlements have no legal basis, and constitute a major impediment to the two-State solution.

And if there is any “bias” in the matter, Mr. President, it would then be that no concrete measures have yet been taken to compel Israel to abide by its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, the Charter and International Law.

Mr. President,

I would also like to commend the Government of France for all the efforts it has deployed to ensure the convening of the Middle East Peace Conference in Paris on January 15, and to welcome its outcome in the form of a “Joint Declaration” which reaffirmed the commitment of all the participants to a negotiated political solution based on two states, and “*underscored the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 as a comprehensive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.*”

Mr. President,

Let me turn to Syria now.

Almost 6 years into the conflict, the time has come to end this crisis which has claimed hundreds of thousands of innocent victims and livelihoods and laid waste to much of the peoples’ properties and country’s infrastructures. This can only be realized through the achievement of a political solution, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace and dignity, in a sovereign unified country, and which paves the way to launch the long and costly reconstruction process, and the return of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes and livelihoods.

Lebanon welcomes the efforts undertaken by Russia and Turkey to facilitate the establishment of a ceasefire in Syria, and the resumption of the political process through the meeting that will be held in Astana later this month. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts by the Government of Kazakhstan to organize and host this very important meeting.

We remain hopeful that the holding of these talks would be a catalyst for the success of the negotiations between the Syrian parties that are scheduled to be held in Geneva on the 8th of February, under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

As to Lebanon, despite an extremely volatile situation in the Middle East, the resumption of the normal functioning of the state institutions is a clear demonstration yet again of the resilience of my Country and the attachment of its citizens to their democratic traditions. At the core of the Ministerial Declaration of the Government of Lebanon, based on the acceptance speech of the newly elected President of the Republic, is the safeguarding of the sovereignty of Lebanon and its stability. In this regard, my government reaffirmed its firm commitment to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 which helped put an end to the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon.

Mr. President,

During this war, Israel bombarded the Jiyeh power plant producing an unprecedented oil spill on the Lebanese shores with substantial environmental impact. And for ten consecutive years, the General Assembly has been adopting, by an overwhelming majority of States from all regional and cross-regional groups, a resolution requesting Israel to assume prompt and adequate compensation to Lebanon for the damage caused by this oil spill, deemed to be in the amount of 856 million dollars as per the Secretary General report.

Mr. President,

Allow me to conclude by reiterating today what I have already said before you in July 2016:

It is almost impossible to maintain peace and security if States are not held responsible for their internationally wrongful acts. Hence, it is our firm belief that it is now the responsibility of this Council, as the main organ entrusted under the UN Charter to maintain peace and security, to act without delay to ensure that Israel compensate Lebanon for the damage related to the oil spill it has caused.

Thank you.