Mr. President,

1. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honor to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations, whose Member States, despite the circumstances that have forced us to be gathered here today, appreciate the convening of this plenary meeting for debating on a matter to which we all attach utmost importance and at a time of continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, thus requiring our collective attention and action, which has regretfully been obstructed yet again by the use of veto by a permanent member of the Security Council.

Mr. President,

2. Although only a fraction of many decades of continued occupation and both systematic and brutal violence, it has now been almost five months since the beginning of this latest and regrettable spiral of violence, death and destruction that has caused the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, particularly women and children, including over a hundred and fifty humanitarian and UN personnel, as well as the destruction of hundreds of homes in the Gaza Strip and all components of civilian life, and forcibly displaced over 85% of the population. It has been five months in which the entire Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip has been living in a true “hell on earth”, as described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as Israel, the Occupying Power, has relentlessly bombarded Gaza by air, land and sea, and imposed an inhumane and crippling siege.

3. The figures from this war are dramatic, to say the least. The death toll just recently reached the 30,000; a figure that could be further surpassed, should Israel carry
out its threat of a military operation in Rafah. This is, perhaps, and needless to say, one of the deadliest and most destructive wars of aggression in history. Yet, despite the bluntness of the images and the abundance of information on this aggression that, for the first time ever, is being transmitted live by its very victims, the Security Council continues to fail in fulfilling its mandate of maintaining international peace and security, as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations, due to the lack of political will from at least one of its permanent members, who has obstructed once again the minimal, yet urgent, demand: the call for an immediate ceasefire; that is, the one thing that will stop the bloodshed, that will stop the forced displacement and that will allow for protection of the Palestinian civilian population, including by ensuring urgent aid to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian conditions, including widespread hunger, disease and lack of shelter.

4. In that regard, we seize this opportunity, on one hand, to commend the effort and leadership of Algeria – a fellow member of our grouping – in championing the Palestinian cause within the Security Council and in responsibly exercising its duties as a non-permanent member of that body, by putting forward an action-oriented draft resolution aimed at nothing more than demanding “an immediate humanitarian ceasefire”, in full line with what the entire humanity is also demanding and marching for in the streets of various capitals around the world, and also in full conformity with the very provisions of resolution A/ES-10/22, overwhelmingly adopted by this very General Assembly.

5. Now, on the other hand, we ought to sincerely regret the negative vote casted on 20 February 2024 by a permanent member of the Security Council, as well as the excuses provided then and also just minutes ago in this meeting, which have once again prevented that body from effectively fulfilling its mandate and rising to both the historic moment and to the expectations of the entire world. As a result, today the Security Council remains falling very much behind the demands made by this General Assembly, which, as we all know, is the most representative organ of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

6. In noting the statement delivered by the Secretary-General just a couple of weeks ago, during his briefing on the priorities for 2024, we concur on the need to recover the *raison d’être* of the United Nations; that is, the pursuit of peace. We need to make the bold move and give peace a chance. We need to act, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and the most basic tenets of international law, and we need to do it now, in the interest of humanity and in order to avert further loss of human life, including a famine that is already foreseen by various experts,
should we not change the current path. In this context, we must stress that starvation must never be used as a method of warfare.

7. We therefore need to continue pushing for peace around the world, including in Gaza, where the Palestinian people has been enduring for way too long not only an inhumane blockade, but over 75-years of Nakba and of an illegal and colonial occupation, coupled with a continued military aggression that has now escalated to a true carnage.

8. An initial step towards rectifying this historic injustice and pursuing peace would be, precisely, achieving a much needed and fully respected ceasefire that puts an immediate end to the ongoing indiscriminate bombing and shelling against all civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, in complete disregard for the provisions of international humanitarian law, and for which it is also equally necessary to halt the transfer of any means to perpetuate this brutal military aggression. This, we are confident, would not only create the conditions for building a sustainable peace, but would also facilitate the work of humanitarian actors on the ground, including the entrance of desperately needed aid and life-saving supplies.

9. In this regard, we also seize this opportunity to call for enhanced support to humanitarian efforts aimed at providing assistance to the Palestinian people, including through UNRWA, which remains a lifeline for Palestine refugees and has played, particularly in these horrific months, and historically, an indispensable humanitarian role, as has been recognized repeatedly by this very General Assembly. Deliberately depriving UNRWA of funds will further imperil the lives of Palestine refugees and displaced civilians in desperate need. Such rash actions by donor countries not only violate commitments undertaken in line with General Assembly resolutions.

10. Moreover, and in light of reports recently issued by some NGOs and other relevant actors on the ground, concerning Israel blocking aid into Gaza, we renew our call for all efforts to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access, consistently, safely and to scale, in order to meet the urgent needs on the ground. This is key for avoiding the total collapse of critical civilian infrastructure, which will inevitably lead to more civilian casualties, widespread hunger, disease, poverty and even greater human suffering and despair, thus, further deepening the already catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, half of the population, which is largely comprised of children and Palestine refugees, and over 85% of which has now been internally displaced.
Mr. President,

11. We underscore that Israel, the Occupying Power, must fully respect and abide by the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), on 26 January 2024; that is, over a month ago; a month in which, regretfully, we have seen no change whatsoever, but rather a pattern of continued and systematic worsening of the situation; neither have we seen a reduction in the number of casualties or attacks against civilians, nor an increase in access of humanitarian aid, much less the indictment of charges against public officials inciting to the commission of the acts foreseen in the “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”.

12. In this context, we also stress the importance of avoiding selectivity or double standards on the application of international law and other legally binding obligations, in order to prevent emboldening the aggressor from committing, among others, further crimes or escalating violence and the commission of mass violations of human rights, and to prevent the further prolongation of the prevailing cycle of impunity.

13. Similarly, we also call for the adoption of urgent measures aimed at ensuring, on one hand, the safety and wellbeing of all civilians, and, on the other one, for facilitating the provision of international protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, including on the basis of relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

14. Looking ahead, and with the intention of ensuring that a political horizon remains in place for the achievement of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, we express our full support to any initiative aimed at addressing the question of the membership of the State of Palestine at the United Nations, so that it can finally be admitted as a full Member State of our Organization. We trust that the Security Council will shoulder its responsibility, at least in this regard, should it be serious about its commitment with the two-State solution and the implementation of its over 90 resolutions on this question.

Mr. President,

15. The Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations reaffirms its firm commitment to the just cause of Palestine, as well as its unwavering solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people in their ongoing struggle to achieve their inalienable rights, including to self-determination, independence and freedom, and
to realize justice. We further reaffirm our full and continued support to all efforts aimed at ending the grave injustice inflicted on the Palestinian people since the 1948 Nakba.

16. We also remain committed to strengthening our efforts, including our active engagement in all international initiatives aimed at ending the illegal Israeli occupation and at achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem / Al-Quds Al-Shariff as its capital, in accordance with the pre-1967 borders.

17. To conclude, while reaffirming our full commitment to preserving, promoting and defending the prevalence and validity of the Charter of the United Nations, we stress once again that a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Question of Palestine in all its aspects, including for the plight of the Palestine refugees and their right to return, in accordance with international law, the relevant UN resolutions and the founding Charter of our Organization, can only be achieved by peaceful means, and therefore call for urgent efforts to address the root causes of this protracted and tragic conflict, which has years of occupation and its subsequent consequences at its core, and to ensure accountability.

I thank you, Mr. President.