



Secretary-General

SG/SM/12158

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

ARAB SUMMIT MEETS AT TIME OF 'PALPABLE UNCERTAINTY', SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL

NOTING ARAB WORLD FACES INSECURITY TODAY, POTENTIAL FOR MORE TOMORROW

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks to the Summit of the League of Arab States, in Doha, Qatar, 30 March:

It is an honour to be here in Doha for this Arab Summit.

I thank His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani for his generosity in hosting this Summit and for his leadership. Qatar has transitioned quickly into one of the most dynamic countries in the world, and has registered impressive achievements in human development. It has also played an important role in peace efforts in the region. I commend Qatar for this commitment and engagement.

I also welcome the marked progress that many Arab States have made towards the Millennium Development Goals. Attainments have been especially notable in the area of education. The United Nations will continue to be your partner in this effort. We want these advances to deepen and spread. We want to help those countries that are still labouring to find the path of broad-based development.

We gather at a time of palpable uncertainty. From the widening fallout of the global economic crisis to the suffering of victims of armed conflict, the Arab world faces insecurity today and the potential for more tomorrow. The toll in human lives and deferred development has been tragically high. The region's large groups of refugees and internally displaced persons continue to live with their dignity under attack and with little ability to plan for their futures.

I remain gravely concerned about Gaza, and about where we stand in the search for an independent Palestinian State. The people of Gaza are suffering, and the situation at the crossings is intolerable. The way forward is a durable ceasefire, open crossings and Palestinian reconciliation. Efforts to achieve this need your united support. It is vital that all those in the region act responsibly to exert what influence they have. The new Israeli Government must allow people and goods to move. It must also freeze settlements, cease unilateral actions in Jerusalem and continue negotiations. I am encouraged that United States President [Barack] Obama has signalled that Middle East peace is a major priority, and that he will not be deterred by the many challenges that lie ahead. I sense a renewed conviction in the entire international community that this conflict doesn't just need to be managed; it needs to be settled. The Arab Peace Initiative embodies this principle, and I will continue to support all efforts to place it at the centre of the search for comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

In Iraq, multiple elections this year aim to strengthen democratic representation, advance the political process and promote stability. I welcome the steady increase in diplomatic representation from neighbouring countries. There remains, of course, considerable potential for increased tensions, including over disputed territories such as Kirkuk. This underlines the importance of continuing to work together in a spirit of common interest.

Lebanon has pulled back from the brink of armed conflict and emerged from the political crisis that had paralysed the normal functioning of State institutions for two years. I look forward to free and transparent elections on 7 June. There have also been gains in implementing Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and other relevant resolutions, although progress on some key aspects has been slow. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon opened its doors earlier this month in The Hague. I reiterate my support for the Tribunal, which is a milestone in efforts to uncover the truth about the [Rafiq] Hariri assassination and bring those responsible for this and related crimes to justice and end impunity.

In Somalia, the present situation offers a rare window of opportunity. The new Government requires immediate support. Those of us with influence on the groups remaining outside of the peace process should call on them to join for the sake of national reconciliation. We must also do more to promote security on the ground, including by supporting AMSOM [African Union Mission in Somalia] and Somali security forces at the upcoming donor conference, to be held on 22 April in Brussels, Belgium. I urge the international community to provide generous contributions and support to Somalia.

In Sudan, the security situation remains volatile. I remain extremely concerned by the Government's decision to expel key international non-governmental organizations, and suspend the work of three national non-governmental organizations that provide life-sustaining services for more than 1 million people. Despite the efforts of Sudanese line ministries, United Nations agencies and the remaining non-governmental organizations, the gaps cannot be filled with existing capacities. I urge the Sudanese authorities once again to reverse this decision.

The United Nations still lacks critical assets for the deployment of UNAMID [African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur]. Even when fully deployed,

however, a peacekeeping operation cannot substitute for a political process. We must press on with the talks here in Doha. We must also work together to transcend the tensions related to the International Criminal Court. Relief efforts should not become politicized. People in need must be helped, irrespective of political differences. At the same time, peace and justice are core principles of the United Nations. We must all be committed to both.

In two days' time I shall be in London for the G-20 [Group of 20] Summit on the global economic crisis. I share your concern about the impact on the Arab world, especially at a time when you are already coping with so many other formidable challenges.

Last December here in Qatar, as the broader contours of the crisis were emerging, the international community adopted the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development. Now that the consequences are more fully upon us, amid widespread job losses and a widening global slowdown, the Declaration can help guide us through these troubled times.

The Declaration calls on donor countries to deliver on targets for official development assistance [ODA]. Beyond ODA, it urges them to mobilize the full range of multilateral resources in order to help developing countries maintain growth. It also stresses the importance of protecting the most vulnerable groups against the severe impacts of the economic crisis.

Since then, the health of the global economy has only deteriorated, with increasingly dire consequences. In London, I will remind the G-20 leaders not only of the commitments they made, but also of the spirit of global solidarity which marked the Doha meeting.

That solidarity is essential; this is a global crisis, and our response must encompass all countries and people. That includes the Arab world, where the crisis has profound implications for sustainable development.

An effective response requires measures to cushion the impact on the poor and vulnerable, so that they do not lose access to health, schooling and other social services – and so that gender disparities are not made even worse. I have called on the world's largest economies to agree on a substantial stimulus package. I have referred to this in detail in my letter to G-20 leaders. I am also warning against trade protectionism, which would only stifle the Arab countries' efforts to integrate more deeply into the world economy.

I will also carry a related message to London: that our response to the economic crisis offers an opportunity to take bold steps to address climate change. This is yet another challenge with which the Arab world is wrestling. Arab States, situated in arid and semi-arid areas, are also particularly prone to adverse impacts of land degradation, desertification, deforestation and forest degradation. Yet, you also have the potential to be in the lead on investments in green energy, which can stimulate growth and job creation. I urge you to do your part in this regard and in negotiations to seal a deal on climate change at the Copenhagen conference in December this year.

And finally, across this agenda, it is essential to create space for civil society and for participation by all people, both women and men, in the decisions that affect their lives.

The United Nations is solidly committed to working with you in pursuit of these objectives. Thousands of United Nations staff are working with their national and regional partners to ensure a bright future for the youth of the region – a future of dignity, democracy, opportunity and peace.

Shukran jazeelan. Thank you very much.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record