



## Secretary-General SG/SM/12811

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### **SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSING REGIONAL SUMMIT, SAYS IT IS CRUCIAL THAT ARAB STATES HELP CREATE FAVOURABLE ATMOSPHERE FOR SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS**

Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's address to the Summit of the League of Arab States in Sirte, Libya, on 27 March:

It is a great honour and privilege to participate in this important Summit. I thank you for inviting me to join you. I express my gratitude to His Excellency Colonel [Muammar] Qadhafi, for his leadership as Chairman of the Arab Summit, and to the people of Libya for their hospitality.

I also pay tribute to His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, the current President of the United Nations General Assembly.

The League of Arab States is a trusted partner of the United Nations. Your history, membership and diversity are strong assets, leaving you well placed to help solve some of the world's thorniest problems. I want to strengthen that partnership, and work with you for peace, justice and democracy.

I commend the Arab League for the heightened attention you are paying to development, such as at last year's economic summit in Kuwait. In September, the United Nations will convene a Summit meeting in New York on the Millennium Development Goals. I urge your countries to be represented at the highest level.

I also welcome your contributions on climate change; especially your investments in research, and mitigation and adaptation measures. As we continue to press for a legally binding agreement this year, building on last year's Copenhagen Accord, the Arab world has a crucial role to play.

The status of women has long been at the core of development challenges in the Arab world. In recent years we have seen strong gains in family law and the participation of women in public life — and tremendous progress in education, more rapid than in any other region. But there are still many who have not been touched by these developments.

Let me turn now to a number of critical regional challenges.

In Iraq, I welcome the holding of national elections earlier this month — another milestone in the country's political transition.

The strong voter turnout, despite threats and attacks, was a testament to the people's will to support stability over confrontation and violence. The challenge now is to form a new Government. That Government will still need strong support from the international community and its neighbours.

In Sudan, we are entering a critical phase, with elections next month and the referenda next year. A top priority will be to ensure that the national elections give all Sudanese people a real voice. With respect to the referenda, these should also allow the people of Southern Sudan to freely determine their own future. The United Nations, together with the international community, will respect your choice.

There should be no let-up in our work to settle the conflict in Darfur. I am encouraged by recent developments, and grateful to the Government of Qatar for its support.

In Somalia, the meeting of the International Contact Group, which the Arab League has generously agreed to host, will help prepare for the international recovery conference in May in Istanbul. The threat from insurgent groups such as al-Shabaab remains profound. I appeal to the Arab States to join us in helping establish accountable stable governance in Somalia.

Let me turn now to the Arab-Israeli conflict. I was honoured to address yesterday's meeting of the Arab League's Follow-up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative. I told them that we share a strong commitment to the same goal: the creation of an independent Palestinian State based on an end to the occupation that began in 1967, finding a way through negotiations for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States, and a just and agreed solution for the refugees.

We also share the same frustration, the same anger, at the effort to achieve this goal: negotiations that prove inconclusive; the continued creation of facts on the

ground; and the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Like all of you, I was deeply dismayed when Israel advanced planning to build 1,600 housing units in East Jerusalem. There are several other recent unilateral actions as well, including decisions on holy sites in Hebron and Bethlehem, further settlement announcements, actions in places like Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, and tensions surrounding the Al-Aqsa mosque.

On all of these, I have been publicly vocal and diplomatically active. I made publicly clear my concerns about the situation. Settlement activity is illegal and must stop. Jerusalem's significance to all must be respected, and it should emerge from negotiations as the capital of two States.

I am aware that regional confidence in the Israeli Government is very low, but there is no alternative to getting the parties to the negotiating table and testing their commitment in that framework.

Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu made personally clear to me that he is ready to discuss all issues.

I am convinced that it is in the strong interest of the Palestinians to test these claims, and to participate in talks by making positive proposals to resolve the core issues. There is no alternative to negotiations for a two-State solution.

I urge you, your majesties, your excellencies, to support efforts to start proximity talks and, eventually, these proximity talks should lead to direct negotiations between the parties. There is no substitute for this. Our common goal should be to resolve all final status issues within 24 months.

For the United Nations, Gaza is a priority. The current situation is unacceptable and unsustainable. The closure is wrong and must end, and I have been working hard on that front. I made this message loud and clear when I visited Gaza last week. I also called publicly for non-violence, a prisoner exchange and Palestinian unity.

I thank Egypt for its important efforts for Palestinian reconciliation.

Turning to the broader regional picture, I am encouraged by the improvement in relations between Lebanon and Syria. However, I am concerned by the recent escalation of rhetoric and tension in the region. I call for restraint and for all concerned to implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The United Nations will continue to work towards comprehensive regional peace, consistent with Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515 and 1850, as well as the Madrid Principles, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. I strongly encourage you to maintain support for the Arab Peace Initiative, which continues to be one of the main pillars in our search for peace.

The parameters of a solution are well known. Our challenge is to get from here to there. The parties themselves have the primary responsibility to build trust, prepare their publics for compromise and find common ground. But it is crucial for the international community and the Arab countries to help create a favourable atmosphere in which the talks can succeed. Let that be our common commitment.

In this regard, I am very concerned at the escalation of violence and loss of life yesterday in the vicinity of the Gaza border and I reiterate my appeals made during my recent visit for maximum restraint and an end to all violence, in particular at this critical time in which we are engaged in efforts to revive peace talks.

I look forward to working closely with you across this agenda. And in conclusion, allow me to say: *Attamana li-hazal mou'tamar kula tawfiq. Shukran Jazeelan, wa assalamu aleykum.* [I wish this Conference every success. Many thanks and peace be upon you.]

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