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Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Report of the Secretary-General

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*A/54/150

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 53/8 of 22 October 1998.

II. Consultations and exchanges of information

2. During the period under review, the secretariats of the United Nations and the League of Arab States (LAS), as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, continued to maintain close contact on matters of mutual concern to the two organizations.
3. On 10 and 11 December 1998, a meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations was convened by Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The meeting was a follow-up to the third high-level meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations convened by the Secretary-General on 28 and 29 July 1998 on the theme of "Cooperation for conflict prevention". Dr. Hussein Hassouna, Permanent Observer, represented the League of Arab States. The meeting reviewed recommendations of the third high-level meeting, developed practical modalities for cooperation in the field of early warning and conflict prevention and exchanged views on the implementation and follow-up process.
4. High-level contacts between the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the League of Arab States included a meeting between the Commissioner-General and the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations in New York, in November 1998. In March 1999, the Director-General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) paid an official visit to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the League offered the UNIDO representative in Cairo observer status at its meetings.

III. Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

5. A summary of the reports of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system on their cooperation with the League of Arab States during the period under review is given below. It represents the follow-up action on proposals adopted at the meetings held between the United Nations and the League of Arab States at Vienna in 1995 (A/50/496) and Geneva in 1997 (A/52/378).

A. United Nations Secretariat

1. Department of Public Information

6. Programmes produced by the Radio and Central News Service covered the following topics: the status of the Middle East peace process, the situations in Iraq and Somalia and the Lockerbie caseC including a statement issued by the League of Arab States welcoming the transfer of the two Libyan suspects in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. It also conducted an interview with Esmat Abdel Maguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, which was broadcast in Egypt, Palestine, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and was also published in three Arabic international dailies. The United Nations Information Centre in Beirut, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, LAS and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, arranged several interviews during a regional meeting on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference

on Women. The information centres in Moscow, Cairo, Harare and Lagos organized seminars and other events to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

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D. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

15. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which directly provides essential education, health care, relief assistance and social services to 3.6 million registered Palestine refugees, has long enjoyed a close cooperative relationship with the League of Arab States. The Agency maintains contact with the secretariat in Cairo and with the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States in New York, participates in regular sectoral meetings organized by the League and seeks to foster cooperation between its officials and the LAS secretariat at various levels and in various fora. In the education sector, the eighth annual joint meeting between UNRWA and the LAS Council of Educational Affairs for the Children of Palestine was held in Cairo in December 1998 to review education services offered to Palestine refugees in the host countries and issues facing the UNRWA education programme.

16. UNRWA continued to benefit from the generous financial support of LAS and its continuing efforts to urge donors to increase voluntary contributions to the Agency. In 1998, member States of LAS contributed US\$ 4.8 million in cash and in-kind to the Agency's regular budget and extrabudgetary special assistance programmes. In April 1999, the LAS Council of Ministers reaffirmed its resolution 4645 of 6 April 1987, which called on its member States to increase their contributions to the 1981 level of 7.73 per cent of the Agency's regular budget. UNRWA's critical financial situation and the role of the Agency were the subject of considerable discussion at LAS meetings during the period under review. The League reiterated its support for the Agency's humanitarian activities, concern over the repeated funding shortfalls faced by the Agency and their implications for Palestine refugees and the host authorities and the importance of increased contributions to the Agency by the international community.

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49. The meeting stressed the importance of the role of regional efforts towards disarmament and noted that regional instability and insecurity were major causes for arms proliferation and arms races. The meeting confirmed that the initiatives of regional parties to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones were important contributions to non-proliferation, disarmament and international peace and security. The meeting recalled the consensus reached in the General Assembly since its thirty-fifth session that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon free zone in the Middle East would greatly enhance international peace and security. For these reasons, the meeting acknowledged with satisfaction the progress made by LAS and its member States in elaborating a draft treaty. The meeting noted that the credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was being called into question owing to the inability of the international community to guarantee universal adherence to it. It was further shaken by the decision of two non-signatories to conduct underground testing.

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