

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE SUMMIT OF THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES

OTunis, 31 March 2019

Monsieur le Président, merci infiniment pour l'invitation. Je remercie le peuple tunisien de son hospitalité.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,

As salaam alaikum.

I am here to further deepen the relationship between the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the peoples of the Arab world.

North Africa and the Middle East are home to remarkable dynamism and potential. It is a region long-striving to build peace and prosperity. I believe it is vital for this region to assume that destiny.

The United Nations has no other agenda than to support those aspirations in a spirit of solidarity and unity.

And I am also here as someone with deep appreciation for the profound contributions of the Arab world to global civilization.

Our world is forever indebted to the enormous creativity and influence of Arab culture over the centuries.

From the ancient House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma) in Baghdad, to the intellectual riches of Córdoba, and reaching as far as the medieval centres of learning in Timbuktu, the Arab world helped to ensure the flow of ideas and scholarship, preserved vital texts and opened the door to a world of epic discoveries and possibilities.

Indeed, we see it from the arts to architecture – from medicine to mathematics – from philosophy to astronomy.

My admiration is not just rooted in history. It is also grounded in my experience as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, where I witnessed so many Arab countries extending remarkable

hospitality to wave upon wave of refugees in a context where, unfortunately, many other borders were closing.

As Secretary-General, we have been working closely together to advance the key role of the Arab world and the role it can play and must play today in the face of turbulent winds.

The citizens of the Arab World have watched carefully the devastating images of the wars in Yemen and Syria, the rise and fall of Daesh and the persistent denial of the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people.

I strongly appeal for the unity of the Arab world as a fundamental condition for peace and prosperity in the region, and to avoid leaving the region vulnerable to interference by foreign parties with destabilizing effects.

As it is the case elsewhere, we know that regional visions rooted in cooperation, respect and mutual interest have the best chance of success.

We need to mobilize our efforts to untangle the Gordian knot of insecurity, allow no space for sectarianism, and deliver the peace, stability and effective, responsive governance that the people of the region deserve.

Across the region, we also see growing demands to create jobs and economic opportunities, to uphold human rights, advance gender equality and women's empowerment and promote the rule-of law, diversity, fundamental freedoms and democratic values.

Allow me to touch upon several current developments and situations in the region which could benefit from a comprehensive regional approach.

The first imperative must be the two-State solution, for Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, and with Jerusalem as capital of both States, as I have always emphasized.

There is no Plan B. Without two states, there is no solution.

The ongoing violence in Gaza is a tragic reminder of the fragility of the situation.

Thank you for your critical support for the vital role of UNRWA – I appeal for your continued strong assistance.

Together, we are making progress towards bringing the suffering in Yemen to an end.

Following last December's breakthrough in Stockholm, we continue to work closely with the parties to achieve progress towards the redeployment of forces in Hudaydah and the opening of humanitarian corridors on the way to a political solution for Yemen.

And thanks to generous pledges from you and others, we have raised \$2.6 billion of the \$4 billion needed to ensure that humanitarian operations in Yemen for them to be sustained and scaled up throughout 2019.

And I strongly appeal to all donors here and in other parts of the world due to the dramatic impact of hunger, cholera and the suffering of the population, in a moment in which humanitarian agencies are running out of cash, to expedite the pledges that were made in order to be able to respond to the dramatic needs of the Yemeni population.

In Libya, I am encouraged by recent progress towards building political consensus for convening the National Conference.

I am hopeful that further progress can be achieved with a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process with the support of the international community within the framework of the UN Action Plan and the roadmap established with other partners and other regional organizations here with us.

It is high time that Libya achieves unified institutions and concludes the transitional stages in line with the objective to reach, at the right moment, general elections.

In Syria, millions of Syrians remain displaced and in need, tens of thousands are arbitrarily detained, and the risk of an even deeper humanitarian catastrophe still looms, in particular in northern Syria. We must keep working to forge a political path to a sustainable peace in which all Syrians are heard, grievances are addressed, and needs are met.

Any resolution of the Syrian conflict must guarantee the unity, the territorial integrity of Syria, including the occupied Golan.

My new Special Envoy has outlined priorities toward establishing an inclusive and credible political solution, based on Security Council Resolution 2254 in its entirety, including the convening of a constitutional committee credible, inclusive, and balanced.

The full support of the international community, and especially of the League of Arab States and its membership, will be essential.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,

The Arab Region and its people have made enormous sacrifices to fight terrorism - and have paid the highest price for this.

The United Nations is stepping up support for the efforts of the Arab States in this struggle – including through an agreement to develop an Arab Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy in line with the UN.

These, and other efforts by the League of Arab States, help open the door for Arab solutions to Arab problems.

We welcome that. I am pleased that we will soon open a new Liaison Office to the League of Arab States in Cairo to help us best support you.

This includes working together to build on the significant progress in Iraq with support, full support, to help consolidate gains, particularly in relations to the institutions of the country, to improve basic services, create jobs and diversify the economy, and foster quality education for all Iraqis that deserve it and that have made considerable progress in the recent past.

In Lebanon, the formation of the Government in January provides a critical opportunity to address challenges to stability, in line with the road map of the 2018 international support conferences and for the benefit of the whole country. In Algeria, I welcome the efforts towards a peaceful and democratic transition process to address the concerns of the Algerian people in a timely way.

In Somalia, it is important to recognize progress in economic stabilization, and to stand united behind Somalia's efforts and collective work to promote an inclusive political dialogue and invest in Somalia's economic recovery.

Finally, I want to add my gratitude to many of you who continue providing generous political and financial support to the United Nations, an invaluable tool for our conflict prevention and resolution activities.

Let us work ever closer together to unleash the full potential of this vital region, respond to the aspirations of the youth and build a better future for all.

Shukran.