



Aboul Gheit's speech
during the
Arab Agricultural Ministers' meeting on "Arab
Food Security and Financing"

26 September 2023



Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I extend a warm welcome to all of you gathered here at the headquarters of the League of Arab States for this crucial meeting. We are convening today to address a pivotal aspect of Arab national security — food security. I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has responded to our invitation, and I am hopeful that our deliberations will yield practical recommendations that align with our collective aspirations.

Food security stands as an inseparable component of Arab national security. Recent events have significantly heightened the attention of Arab governments towards this issue. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the perils of overreliance on global supply chains, and the conflict in Ukraine underscored the



importance of preparedness for potential reductions in imports. This is particularly pertinent in the case of grains, which alone account for half of the Arab food deficit. Additionally, we cannot overlook the profound adverse impacts of sudden price surges.

As you are well aware, the League of Arab States has diligently crafted numerous strategies and plans concerning Arab food security over the past decades. The most recent of these initiatives was solidified during the 2022 Algiers Summit. It is worth noting that during this summit, several critical measures were endorsed, including the adoption of the Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development Strategy (2020–2030), the launch of the Arab Programme for Sustaining Food Security, the initiation of projects aimed at enhancing the quality of domestically produced wheat, and the promotion of innovative crop technologies, among other vital plans.



In this context, the Arab Summit entrusted the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, collaborative Arab institutions, and the Arab private sector with the responsibility of executing these programmes and finalising their implementation strategies in partnership with member states.

Our meeting today is primarily focused on addressing pressing questions related to a multifaceted crisis that we cannot afford to delay in confronting. Time is of the essence, especially considering the challenging circumstances we currently face. While the ongoing global food crisis affects the entire world, its repercussions on the Arab region are particularly disconcerting, given our region's unique geographical, demographic, and intricate political history.

The data concerning Arab food security reveals an alarming trend — a steadily increasing food



deficit, currently estimated at over 100 million tons of food products. This deficit results from a confluence of intricate and interwoven factors, including the burgeoning population of the Arab world, projected to nearly double by 2050, reaching approximately 800 million. Furthermore, the diminishing rates of rainfall across the Arab world due to climate change, the expansion of urban areas, the persistent issue of displacement, and various other influential factors all contribute to this challenging scenario.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have called for organising this meeting due to our growing concern over the deteriorating indicators related to food security. This situation demands swift action to enhance Arab capabilities in food production, making the most of the region's resources and expertise.

I would like to briefly present some key ideas:



First: Addressing the Arab food deficit unequivocally requires the establishment of an Arab financing mechanism. This mechanism should ensure a continuous flow of capital and promote investments in sustainable projects, with a focus on advancing Arab competencies in clean energy and smart, sustainable agriculture. Additionally, we should consider the creation of a national executive committee tasked with granting tax incentives in these sectors and facilitating access to soft loans for investors and small-scale farmers. These small farmers constitute the majority of producers and are in dire need of support.

Second: The Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have triggered global discussions about reforming the international financial system. These discussions have arisen in response to the failure of developing nations to benefit adequately from these institutions,



often resulting in heavy debt burdens. I see this ongoing debate as an opportunity for Arab nations to advocate for reforms that facilitate access to essential financial resources and soft loans specifically aimed at enhancing their capacity to produce essential food commodities and their related inputs.

Third: The issue of Arab food security, given its paramount significance, will remain a top priority on the agenda of joint Arab action in the foreseeable future. This emphasis is especially evident as political leaders acknowledge its vital role. In this context, I wish to highlight that the upcoming fifth Development Summit in Mauritania should incorporate a dedicated segment on financing Arab food security, considering the compelling reasons I've previously outlined.



Fourth: Continuing in the same vein, I would like to bring to your attention that the Higher Coordination Committee for Joint Arab Action, presided over by myself, convened last June in Tunisia. During this meeting, we approved the proposition to establish a recurring Arab Week for Food Security. I propose that this week's activities place a strong focus on the subject of financing. I also extend an invitation to all of you to actively contribute to the topics and discussions of this event.

Fifth: The enhancement of Arab initiatives in the realm of food security necessitates unequivocal support for Arab organisations dedicated to this cause, notably the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD), the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, and the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development. This support should primarily manifest as increased financial resources,



particularly those allocated to project implementation in the Arab world.

In conclusion, I urgently appeal to all stakeholders to provide the essential financial backing required for the establishment of Arab initiatives aimed at bridging the food gap. This collaboration should encompass government sectors, financial institutions, and the Arab private sector. My hope is that our meeting today marks the inception of concrete steps towards achieving these objectives.

Thank you.