

The speech of Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, at the opening of the 160th ordinary session of the League of Arab States Council at the ministerial level

General Secretariat: 6 September 2023

Your Excellency Mr. Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates

President of the 160th ordinary session of the League Council at the ministerial level

Your Highnesses and Excellencies the Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Your Excellency, the Minister, on the Kingdom of Morocco's assumption of the presidency for the 160th session of the Ministerial Council. I wish you the utmost success in this role. I also want to express my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Sameh Shoukry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, for his exceptional leadership during the 159th session of the Council.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is abundantly clear that joint Arab action holds a dual significance and increased relevance given the prevailing confusion, turbulence, and uncertainty in the international arena. The ongoing 19-month conflict in Ukraine serves as a distressing reminder of the return to major power conflicts, bringing with it far-reaching consequences. Such intense conflicts have grave implications for global peace, affecting its security, political stability, and economic dimensions alike.

Recent developments underscore the necessity of enhancing collective efforts among diverse stakeholders. This entails the coordination of stances among nations striving to safeguard their strategic autonomy and the establishment of collaborative platforms to tackle matters pertaining to the preservation of their national interests.

I believe that the League of Arab States has achieved significant progress in recent months, working on multiple fronts to strengthen its collaborations with various international powers. These partnerships hold immense strategic value for our nations. Notable examples include the inaugural Arab-Chinese summit hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last December and the recently concluded third session of the Arab-Japanese dialogue. Furthermore, we eagerly anticipate the upcoming Arab-African summit set to take place in November, hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This summit represents a crucial and timely step in solidifying our relations with partners and friends in Africa, a continent currently undergoing transformative changes that we are closely monitoring.

These partnerships, among others, signify a necessary and essential effort to connect the Arab region with diverse international blocs and influential nations, encompassing a broad spectrum of issues that directly impact the welfare and interests of Arab citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The crisis in Sudan persists, exacting an unbearable toll on the Sudanese people. Regrettably, as we continue to witness ongoing fighting in Sudanese cities, the number of displaced individuals seeking refuge and abandoning their homes is on the rise. For the civilian population, life has become increasingly untenable, with state institutions and vital services disintegrating. We are dangerously approaching a state of all-encompassing civil conflict, a scenario we fervently hope Sudan and its people can avoid.

We are acutely aware that the immediate imperative is to take swift action towards achieving a comprehensive resolution to this crisis. First and foremost, this entails securing a sustainable ceasefire in all Sudanese cities, paving the way for a return to the political process that safeguards the unity of the state, its institutions, and its armed forces.

In addition to these urgent objectives, we must prioritise immediate humanitarian assistance. In this vein, I am pleased to announce the launch of an initiative aimed at preserving the agricultural season in Sudan. Following consultations with the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development, which has identified the pressing needs of the Sudanese agricultural sector, I extend an invitation to Arab agriculture ministers to consider ways their nations can support this initiative. Its success will be instrumental in fortifying the food security of the Sudanese people, and I hope it will garner the support it merits from Arab countries.

In Yemen, despite a decrease in military operations over the past few months, achieving a comprehensive ceasefire and a political settlement still remains an elusive objective. There are those who seem to favour the status quo, which has led to the division of the country, weakened its institutions, and caused severe economic and social hardships. However, our collective aspiration is to preserve a united and sovereign Yemen, encompassing all its national territories, free from external interference. This goal is attainable if the Houthi party recognises its potential role within a comprehensive political process rather than attempting to maintain sole control through force of arms.

In Syria, there has been a significant development in recent months, which we all applaud. We extend our appreciation to the member states that contributed to this achievement. The suffering of the Syrian people remains a primary concern, given its impact not only on Syria but also on neighboring countries and Arab national security as a whole.

In this context, I commend the continued constructive engagement of Arab nations, exemplified by the recent meeting of the Ministerial Liaison Committee held in Cairo last month. This engagement has resulted in the League of Arab States' strengthened support for Syria across all aspects of its crisis, with a focus on preparing a clear path towards resolution through a gradual and step-by-step approach, guided by the principles of reciprocity and in accordance with UN Resolution 2254.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Palestinian cause, a shared concern for all of us, confronts significant challenges, primarily stemming from the policies pursued by the far-right government in Israel. This government's agenda is rooted in settlement expansion rather than a genuine pursuit of peace. It is more interested in annexing territory than endorsing a two-state solution. Instead of contributing to a solution, it exacerbates the situation in the occupied territories through its provocative actions and policies.

The international community bears a substantial responsibility in addressing this deteriorating situation, which poses a threat of escalating tensions that no party desires. It is imperative not to allow the Israeli government to transfer its internal crises to the Palestinian arena. The extremist elements within this government must be held accountable, and their racist rhetoric and acts of violence should not be tolerated. The settlers who incite these actions and the apartheid policies they advocate, increasingly implemented in Palestinian cities, towns, and villages, require scrutiny and condemnation.

Mr. President,

The next phase calls for a heightened level of Arab engagement across various fronts, allowing us to effectively respond to ongoing changes. Undoubtedly, the economic crises affecting not only the world but also our region demand top priority from all our nations.

In this context, I'd like to draw attention to the forthcoming Fifth Economic and Social Development Summit, expected to be hosted by Mauritania before the year's end under the theme "Food Security is a Guarantee of Sovereignty." This topic has gained increasing importance given the disruption in grain supply chains due to the conflict in Ukraine and other pressing threats, such as the prolonged drought affecting Somalia in recent years. The Economic and Social Council has already discussed the draft agenda for this summit, and the General Secretariat has received numerous initiatives related to food security, the green economy, social protection, and more. We are currently refining these initiatives to align with the summit's overarching theme, and we all hope that this summit will serve as a pivotal moment in advancing collective Arab action on this critical issue.

In closing, I extend my best wishes for the success of our meeting. Thank you, and may peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you.