

Excellencies

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking ECHO Amman for inviting me to participate in this important meeting for the first time on behalf of the League of Arab States. It is always a pleasure to meet with people who share a commitment to humanitarian issues, to human life, safety, security, and human dignity. Although I would have been much happier if there was no need to have this meeting, and no need for the work we trying to achieve,

As a Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief, I have the great pleasure to exchange with you today views and ideas about how together we can enhance humanitarian assistance mechanisms for people in need in the region.

I would like to start first by affirming that whether it is LAS or the EU or any other inter-governmental organization—humanitarian intentions will always fall short in front of political considerations.

The different humanitarian crisis in the Arab region has become a fact that we can't deny.... Whether it is a natural or a man-made disaster or other major life threatening issues like food insecurity, safety, poverty, shelter, water, health care or populations' displacements, the crisis has definitely reached very high peaks. I guess the League of Arab States with UN agencies

are facing tremendous challenges and obstacles in terms of providing solutions and alleviating peoples' suffering.

Excellencies,

The League of Arab States believes that humanitarian work is comprehensive and collective. It should be based on mutual cooperation and coordination between the different levels of the concerned stakeholders... Stronger partnerships and more information sharing are surely needed ....It is very true that lack of financial resources is not always the main challenge facing international and regional organizations.... Our work should focus on alleviating suffering not on ending their sources....

And although the intentions, the humanitarian commitments, the absolute conviction that people's lives are a priority—politics take over. And frequently, the political has a negative impact on the humanitarian. Humanitarian role still follows the political one; and this is not only the case in Middle East but rather everywhere...

Excellencies,

The League of Arab States had always responded to the different crisis throughout the region. Examples are: Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan and today Syria.... Then in an attempt to take a real role in the region regarding humanitarian interventions, LAS had established a humanitarian section at its Social Sector. Many further steps were taken later; such as building partnerships with

International and regional humanitarian organizations as well as non-governmental ones, and this meeting is one of them.

LAS was always engaged in different dialogue processes with Arab governments and NGOs to reach common understandings on the best ways to address critical humanitarian issues.

In 2013, I had the great honor to be appointed as the Secretary General Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief. From my perspective, only when there is a sincere will and determination, crisis can be resolved.

Dear Excellencies,

I will seize today's opportunity to present a brief about LAS efforts regarding humanitarian assistance in the Arab region.

- In Sudan, Aid has encompassed Darfour, Cordovan, Blue Nile, Eastern Sudan and has included:
  - medical aid, volunteer doctors and surgeons, medical training;
  - nutritional aid and awareness;
  - vaccination, prevention education and awareness;
  - water wells, water stations and sanitation;
  - health clinics, hospital rehabilitation, renovation and equipment;
  - reproductive, prenatal and post natal health training and awareness

- In Palestine—and particularly Gaza, aid has been ongoing and inclusive. In addition to reconstruction and rehabilitation of health care centers and hospitals and medical equipment, it has included reconstruction of homes, streets, community centers, places of worship. LAS has also been committed to ongoing and regular aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza which has included water and electricity; and an annual commitment to the health sector.

These are only two examples of the past decade.

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always hard to find the proper words when talking about the Syrian crisis .... A crisis that has been described as the greatest and worst in our modern time .... The crisis now is about to enter its fourth year causing an increase in the number of internally displaced people and refugees; and of course more killing and injuries are expected .... The deteriorated humanitarian situation in Syria made all humanitarian organizations and actors realize how many challenges and responsibilities we have towards the Syrian people .... We just can't deny the fact that Syria now is facing real famine, poverty, shortage in education, damaged health sector .... Neighboring countries are also affected ... though they have generously hosted more than 2 million Syrians, governments today are admitting that this has become a burden that they can't bear anymore... Over 50 meetings and nearly 100 resolutions have been issued and still there is no political solution

yet .... This means that the situation will definitely worsen...The League of Arab States has always been available for the Syrian crisis .... Several field missions were arranged to visit Syrian refugee camps in the neighboring countries .... However, humanitarian assistance wasn't more than delivering basic medical needs and other life services .... Even the two Donors Conferences that were held to support the Syrian Peoples weren't sufficient enough .... Thus, so many questions can be raised here .... How we should all cooperate in addressing difficulties and obstacles that hinder our humanitarian intervention???

.... How are we going to build solid trustful relationships between donors and humanitarian relief works???

... What types of partnerships will promote more coordination and communication to cover all the existing gaps???

... What are the tools and programs that will improve our performance???

.... In this regard, LAS is always committed to call for collective efforts and urge the international community to reach a solution that may end this crisis ....

Having presented you with this reality, both emotionally jarring and challenging to us as people concerned with the humanitarian issues, I would like to share with you some of the experiences gained from my field visits with Syrian refugees in Jordan and in Lebanon. It will be followed by a short film commissioned by LAS.

## Lebanon

To date, Lebanon has received the highest number of refugees. UNHCR estimates 1million 300thousand registered refugees, while the Lebanese government estimates them at 2 million.

- There has been a lack of official documentation and registration in Lebanon, as well as a lack of formal refugee camps.
- There have been informal concentrations of refugees through their own individual initiative.
- Refugees suffer from a lack of any safety and security standards in the shelters provided.
- In many cases they have had to pay a rental cost for inadequate shelter.
- Although educational services are provided, they are insufficient—where 75% of refugee children have not been enrolled in education in the past 3 years
- Medical services to women are limited or non-existent, particularly reproductive, pre natal, post natal care, as well as psychological support for abused women
- Health, psychological care and protection for the elderly and persons with chronic illnesses or disabilities has been inadequate
- There has also been a prevalence of child labour among refugee children, including labour in dangerous occupations
- Communicable diseases have spread among refugee children (However, vaccination campaigns were initiated by Lebanese Ministry of Health as of six months ago)

## **Jordan**

- Overall number of registered refugees estimated at 600,000
- Only 30% reside in refugee camp (Zaatari Camp)
- 16% of refugee children are engaged in child labour, often in dangerous occupations
- Influx of refugees has resulted in pressure on water and electricity causing social tension
- Levels of assistance in terms of food, shelter, sanitation, water, health have been found to be adequate as of Oct 2013 (one year ago)
- According to Doctors without Borders there are no health crises in the camp and both children and general population mortality rates are below crisis levels
- Malnutrition rates are within acceptable levels and not dangerous
- There are high rates of hyper tension and trauma related physical conditions
- Three UNICEF run schools are able to accommodate another 50% of school age children

## **In both Lebanon and Jordan**

- Both countries have allowed free and subsidized access to public education
- 50% of refugees in both countries are under 18
- Schools have been operating in two-shifts to accommodate refugee students

- Both countries have allowed access to free health care—however in Lebanon it is not as accessible
- Immunization campaigns have started in both countries and have reached almost full coverage
- Refugees are subject to human trafficking for purposes of prostitution—including young children
- They are also susceptible to recruitment into radical political organizations, organized crime, mafias...etc.

### **Security and Protection**

It is difficult to speak of refugee humanitarian issues, aid and situation without acknowledging the regional political realities.

The refugee crisis is not created in a vacuum. These are people with political opinions and affiliations which will automatically be transferred to their new environment and translated into action and reaction within the host communities.

Therefore, in addition to economic, social and resources pressures in host countries, there are also security and stability concerns.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since LAS deeply believes that improving humanitarian relief and assistance in the region is a priority so that it can meet the requirements of the current situation, LAS has developed an initiative to establish an Arab humanitarian coordination mechanism.



The initiative was proposed at the Arab Summit that was held in Kuwait in March 2014; resulting in a resolution that indicated “the establishment of such a mechanism within the framework of general secretariat to coordinate the humanitarian work in the Arab region”

This mechanism aims at advocating for humanitarian issues in order to alleviate affected peoples’ sufferings in LAS member states and find proper solutions that can face the existing challenges to respond to crises efficiently. It also aims at promoting the exchange and sharing of knowledge, information and expertise among Arab, regional and international organizations active in humanitarian issues. It will also include the establishment of an information system and data base, as well as building capacities, and benefit from experiences of international humanitarian organizations and agencies to achieve the required goals.

The mechanism is still in its early stages .... LAS has been working closely with OCHA on preparing a concept note ... Though no concrete steps have been achieved yet, LAS is currently working on the implementation of establishing this mechanism that we hope it will have a positive impact for the sake of humanitarian benefit....

Dear Excellencies,

Thank you very much for your attention, I’d like to open the floor now for Questions but first allow me to begin with the first Question after watching a brief film.....

