

Speech of His Excellency the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States at the opening session of the Economic and Social Council at the preparatory ministerial level to the Council of the League of Arab States at the summit level, 32<sup>nd</sup> ordinary session

Delivered by Ambassador Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General, head of the Office of the Secretary-General

Jeddah, 15 May 2023

His Excellency Mr. Mohamed bin Abdullah Al-Jadaan

Minister of Finance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Chairman of the 32<sup>nd</sup> ordinary session of the Council of the League of Arab States at the summit level

His Excellency Ambassador Hamid Shabira, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria in Cairo and Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, heads of Delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honour to convey the greetings of the Secretary-General, along with his fervent wishes for the success of this meeting. His Excellency has entrusted me with the responsibility of delivering this speech on his behalf, as he is unable to attend due to prior engagements in Cairo.

Today marks the commencement of the first preparatory ministerial meeting for the 32nd ordinary session of the Arab Summit, under the auspices of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, hosted in the beguiling city of Jeddah, also known as the "Bride of the Red Sea."

On this occasion, I extend my warmest felicitations and profound gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, led by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, for assuming the leadership of the joint Arab action this year. I wish the Kingdom's leadership, government, and people continued prosperity and triumph.

Esteemed President and distinguished delegates,

Our meeting today takes place amidst encouraging developments in the Arab region, specifically concerning one of the most pressing Arab crises that has remained unresolved for over a decade, the Syrian crisis. I am delighted to note that the delegations of the Syrian government have resumed their participation in the meetings of the League of Arab States, in implementation of the decision of the Arab foreign ministers in their meeting last week.

In this regard, the General Secretariat is set to coordinate with the Syrian side to keep them informed of the progress in the Arab work in the economic and social fields. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Dr. Muhammad Samer Al-Khalil, Minister of Economy and

Foreign Trade of the Syrian Arab Republic, and express our hope for constructive collaboration between all parties involved.

The positive developments we witness today in the Arab region should strengthen our resolve to activate the principle of Arab solidarity, which has already begun to take its rightful place in practical support and cooperation between Arab countries, reflecting the fraternal bonds that the Arab people have long aspired to achieve. However, we must not lose sight of the serious challenges that continue to plague our region and threaten the foundations of our society and security. These challenges are complex and intertwined, causing a new wave of displacement and asylum seekers, and affecting various aspects of life due to these crises.

Given these challenges, I urge this esteemed council, as the executive arm of the system of joint Arab action in the economic and social fields, to intensify efforts to develop practical plans with clear timelines to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable groups in Arab societies and those facing extreme difficulties. The League of Arab States is fully committed to facilitating these efforts and coordinating movements towards sustainable solutions.

The agenda of today's meeting deals with crucial topics that have been extensively discussed by specialised committees and work teams, and approved by ministerial councils. These topics include the Arab Strategy for Tourism, the Arab Digital Agenda, and the Second Arab Agreement for Persons with Disabilities. The latter is a pivotal initiative launched by the Secretary-General to provide job opportunities and better lives for persons

with disabilities, who are among the groups most affected by pandemics, economic crises, and natural disasters.

Transportation is a fundamental pillar of Arab economic integration, and the delay in joining and activating transport agreements has hindered the growth and prosperity of intra-Arab trade. Therefore, this council will deliberate on ways to activate these agreements and advance them to facilitate economic growth and development.

The issue of Arab food security is also a top priority, given the dwindling food stocks on a global level and the challenges of population growth. The Algiers Summit approved several plans, including the sustainable programme for Arab food security, the Arab strategy for sustainable agricultural development, and the initiative to enhance the technological quality of locally produced wheat, among others. These issues will receive further discussion during the upcoming Arab summits, including the fifth session of the Arab Development Summit: Economic and Social, scheduled to be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Mauritania before the end of this year.

In conclusion, I convey the Secretary-General's congratulations to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for assuming the presidency of the joint Arab action this year, and I wish this meeting every success.

May peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you all.

Thank you.