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### **Doha Declaration November 19, 1997**

#### **1997 Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference**

On 16-18 November 1997, the Middle East and North Africa Economic Conference was held in Doha, Qatar, under the presidency of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. The Conference, co-sponsored by the United States and the Russian Federation, with the support of Canada, the European Union and Japan, brought together senior government and private sector leaders from the Middle East and North Africa, as well as from other parts of the world.

Conference participants thanked His Highness Sheikh Hamad and the Government of the State of Qatar for hosting this gathering, and for the excellent organization and generous hospitality provided. Recognizing the difficult political circumstances, the participants expressed their appreciation for both Qatar's courageous leadership in the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and for honouring its international commitment to host the Conference.

Participants of the Doha Economic Conference expressed their strong commitment to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, on the basis of the Madrid Peace Conference formula, i.e. land for peace, and the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Despite the current obstacles to peace, the participants called for broadening and deepening progress on all outstanding issues of the Arab-Israeli negotiating tracks of the peace process. They reaffirmed their determination to uphold the agreements reached among the parties, in particular those agreements between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They also underlined the critical importance of the faithful and expeditious implementation of those agreements and commitments by all parties.

The theme for the Doha Economic Conference was "Creating a new public/private partnership for trade and economic growth beyond the year 2000." This was endorsed by the presence of 850 foreign business participants together with officials representing over 65 countries, as well as a number of international organizations. The participants noted that the region's economic, commercial and trade potential has been greatly enhanced by important economic reform programmes currently being undertaken by many states in the region. Privatization, structural reform and removal of trade barriers have provided for a more business-friendly economic climate throughout the region and will strengthen the ability to attract foreign investment and trade. They reaffirmed their support for deepening the infrastructure of peace.

The participants stressed the crucial importance of the development of the Palestinian economy. It was noted with grave concern that the Palestinian economy continues to suffer from imposed

restrictions and closures which hinder the daily movement of Palestinian labour and trade. The situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past year. The participants reiterated that immediate removal of these restrictive measures and closures will contribute positively to the performance of the Palestinian economy and is essential toward restoring confidence between the concerned parties in the commitment to the peace process and contributing towards creating the conditions necessary for all parties in the region to live in peace, prosperity and security in order to enhance the economic viability of the region as a whole.

International business leaders were able to explore and develop new commercial opportunities. Constructive and fruitful discussions were held on topics of particular relevance to both the countries of the region and the international business community. The Conference also provided a unique opportunity for business participants to expand their network of public and private contacts in the region.

Participants reviewed the institutions called for by the previous MENA Conferences held at Casablanca, Amman and Cairo. The progress made on establishing the Middle East-Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association in Tunis was welcomed. The importance of the Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa, to be located in Cairo, was underscored, as well as its potential contribution to the promotion of capital flow to the region, to building infrastructure projects and to the development of the private sector. Countries still in the process of ratification were encouraged to complete the procedures of ratification and funding promptly so as to enable the Bank to begin operations in 1998. The work of the international transition team on this project was welcomed. Business participants would like to see a resumption of efforts to establish a Regional Business Council.

Between conferences the MENA Executive Secretariat in Rabat will continue to explore and develop programmes and activities that foster public/private partnership in the region.

The activities of the REDWG Monitoring Committee Secretariat established in Amman pursuant to the Amman Declaration, and formally inaugurated and institutionalized in May 1996, were noted. The activities of REDWG and the work of its Monitoring Committee in areas covered by the Copenhagen Action Plan, i.e., infrastructure, tourism, trade and finance were also reviewed.

The participants expressed their appreciation for the unique role played by the World Economic Forum, whose tireless and dedicated efforts were critical to the success of the Conference. They also expressed their gratitude to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York for its important contributions to Conference's programmes.

The participants pledged their commitment to convening the fifth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference during 1998 and agreed that members of the Steering Committee should consult widely with the private sector as agreed in the Casablanca Declaration and should convene before the end of the year to select the next venue. The next host country would be announced at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos at the end of January 1998.