

In the name of God, the most merciful and the most compassionate, praise be to God Almighty, the knower of the unseen and the unknown who revealed the following in the Holy Quran: "Dispute not one with another lest ye falter and your strength depart from you."

Peace and prayer be upon the Prophet of mercy, who urged that ranks and objectives be unified by stating that "the believers in their amicability, compassion and warmth are like the human body; if an organ feels an ailment, the rest of the body will react with pain and sleeplessness."

My brethren, the leaders of the Arab nation: my brethren, the people of our Arab and Islamic nation: God's peace and mercy be upon you.

I greet all of you with the greeting of Islam. And I thank the fraternal country of Lebanon; the Lebanon of pride and national unity; the Lebanon of all Arabs, with all its religious and sectarian affiliations, for hosting this summit at this critical and turbulent juncture in history in which events are unfolding, and whose ultimate outcome is known only to God Almighty.

In spite of all that has happened - and what still may happen - the primary issue in the heart and mind of every person in our Arab and Islamic nation is the restoration of legitimate rights in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

These rights, which are bound to the cherished occupied lands, can not be erased from memory, nor will the passage of time diminish their importance. No right is lost that has an advocate behind it. Those who follow the intifada of our brothers in Palestine, which has the support of all Arabs and Muslims, realise that steadfastness will not wither, that bravery will not retreat, and that justice will prevail.

Every person in Palestine - young and old - understands that the way to the liberation of his land and soil is either through steadfastness and struggle, or a just and comprehensive peace. It is therefore incumbent on the Israeli government to realise and understand this and deal with it by embarking on a new path, and that is the path of peace.

My dear brethren: the noble people of the Arab and Islamic nation: when the Arabs opted for peace as a strategic choice, they did not do so out of crippling desperation or debilitating weakness, and Israel is mistaken if it believes that it can impose an unjust peace by force.

We embarked upon the peace process with open eyes and clear minds, and we have not accepted then, nor will we accept now, that this process is transformed into a non-binding obligation imposed by one party on the other. Peace is a free and voluntary choice made by two equal parties, and it can not survive if it is based on oppression and humiliation.

The peace process is based on a clear principle: land for peace. This principle is accepted by the international community as a whole, and is embodied in U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and was adopted by the Madrid conference in 1991. It was confirmed by the resolutions of the European Community and other regional organisations, and re-emphasised once more this month, by U.N. Security Council resolution 1397.

My esteemed brethren: it is clear in our minds, and in the minds of our brethren in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, that the only acceptable objective of the peace process is the full Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with al-Quds al-Shareef (East Jerusalem) as its capital, and the return of refugees.

Without moving towards this objective, the peace process is an exercise in futility and a play on words and a squandering of time which perpetuates the cycle of violence. The return to the negotiating table is a meaningless endeavour if the negotiations do not produce tangible and positive results, as has been the case for the past 10 years.

Allow me at this point to directly address the Israeli people, to say to them that the use of violence, for more than 50 years, has only resulted in more violence and destruction, and that the Israeli people are as far as they have ever been from security and peace, notwithstanding military superiority and despite efforts to subdue and oppress.

Peace emanates from the heart and mind, and not from the barrel of a cannon, or the exploding warhead of a missile. The time has come for Israel to put its trust in peace after it has gambled on war for decades without success. Israel, and the world, must understand that peace and the retention of the occupied Arab territories are incompatible and impossible to reconcile or achieve.

I would further say to the Israeli people that if their government abandons the policy of force and oppression and embraces true peace, we will not hesitate to accept the right of the Israeli people to live in security with the people of the region.

We believe in fighting in self-defence and to deter aggression. But we also believe in peace when it is based on justice and equity, and when it brings an end to conflict. Only within the context of true peace can normal relations flourish between the people of the region and allow the region to pursue development rather than war and destruction.

Dear brethren, in light of the above, and in this place with you and amongst you, and with your backing and that of the Almighty, I propose that the Arab summit put forward a clear and unanimous initiative addressed to the United Nations Security Council based on two basic issues: normal relations and security for Israel in exchange for full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, recognition of an independent Palestinian state with al-Quds al-Shareef (East Jerusalem) as its capital, and the return of refugees. At the same time, I appeal to all friendly countries throughout the world to support this noble humanitarian proposal which seeks to remove the danger of destructive wars and the establishment of peace for all the inhabitants of the region, without exception.

I ask God Almighty to guide us to the correct decision, and to provide us with the determination of the believer, for he is our Lord and ultimate benefactor. God's peace and blessing be upon you.