

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Your Excellency President Abdel Fattah Al Sissi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Your Excellency Mr. Børge Brende, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like first to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for the chairs of this conference, for all co-sponsors, and for all the states and organizations present here today. Your acceptance of this invitation and your presence here, goes to show both the nobility of your intentions and your willingness to support the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

I would like to especially thank the Arab Republic of Egypt and his Excellency President Abdel Fattah Al Sissi for his commendable nationalist stances on 'Palestine.' In particular, Egypt's initiative and tireless efforts to achieve a cease-fire and end Israel's blockade on the Strip. I would also like to thank him for hosting this conference, which only comes as a furtherance of Egypt's central and pioneering role in supporting our people and their just cause.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Kingdom of Norway for responding positively to our request for the commencement of this conference in its capacity as the chair of the AHLC. Particularly, in lieu of the human catastrophe, the destruction, and the displacement that befell the Gaza strip impacting most of its houses, infrastructure, facilities, institutions, and above all, its residents. A situation requiring urgent intervention and significant resources in order to re-build and

reconstruct the Strip and restore our people's lives and dignity.

Mr. President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I had hoped that we did not need to convene such a conference for the second time. I had hoped that the peace process built on the basis of the Oslo agreements and signed more than twenty years ago would find success. I had hoped that the Arab Peace Initiative was implemented, and that the vision of a two-state solution was respected. Yet, none of the aforementioned occurred despite the best efforts of the Quartet, successive US administrations and the international community at large. The failure is due to Israel's insistence on occupying the land of the 'State of Palestine,' including in and around its capital, 'East' Jerusalem.

The most recent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, which resulted in vast destruction and uncountable catastrophes is unbearable and cannot pass without consequence. Yet, we will continue to work and coordinate closely with Egypt and all relevant parties to maintain and consolidate the ceasefire.

Since the first moments of the aggression on Gaza, and as part of our responsibilities to our people, we took it upon ourselves to initiate calls, conduct meetings and organize several diplomatic tours for the sake of stopping the bloodshed and concluding a cease-fire agreement. To that end, we sent a delegation from our own leadership to Cairo to guarantee the realization of this objective. The delegation succeeded in formulating the necessary arrangements for the operation of border crossings and for the entry of those materials necessary for the reconstruction process, ensuring the material's delivery to those specific projects supervised by the government and in coordination with UN agencies.

Understandings were also reached with relevant Israeli authorities for the realization of those objectives. This comes alongside our demands to all parties to act responsibly by facilitating the implementation of this task and refraining from placing any obstacles towards achieving its objectives.

Mr. President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

the Gaza Strip has faced enormous destruction in property and life as a result of three consecutive wars within a period of six years. The number of martyrs reached to 3760, including 2145 in the recent war, while the number of injured reached 18,100, including 11,200 in the latest war. The total number of houses destroyed or damaged stands at more than 80,000, including 61,800 in the latest war. Infrastructure, public facilities, private sector establishments were massively damaged, including the only electricity generation plant in the Strip. Not to mention the water, sanitation, electricity, telecommunication, and transportation networks.

As a result of this war, innumerable and unspeakable tragedies befell the people of Gaza, including the destruction of entire neighborhoods, and eradication of more than 90 families from the population registry. More than 100,000 remain without shelter, and hundreds of thousands of others are now displaced once again. The people of Gaza require assistance in reuniting their fortunes, healing their wounds, and they require assistance by those who would extend their hand of support, provide for temporary residence and rebuild their homes, knowing that many of those homes were not rebuilt since the 2009 aggression.

The private sector sustained huge loses as thousands of economic, industrial, agricultural, and commercial establishments were

destroyed. Such destruction has caused a crippling blow to this vital and vibrant sector, leading both to the loss of thousands of jobs and a major loss in capital.

Here, we would like to reiterate our support for the private sector in Gaza so that it can rise again and recover. The government will provide all necessary support in order to enable the private sector from contributing significantly to the reconstruction process, and will work towards removing obstacles in the import/export sector. The government will also work towards enabling the private sector from importing both equipment and material for the reconstruction process, and for moving the entire sector ahead.

On another level, there is an urgent need for assistance in rebuilding Gaza Strip's public institutions, which along with its counterparts in the West Bank, should be under the mandate of the national consensus government, with all obstacles towards this end removed.

There is also an urgent need to re-operate the crossings between the Palestinian cities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and between 'Palestine' and the rest of the world. It is not logical for the Palestinian economy to remain subject to the whims and destructive policies of 'the occupation.'

Here I would like to address our people in the Gaza Strip:

You are in our hearts. We will work relentlessly to undo the injustice that befell you and end the suffering that you've been experiencing for years. We will heal your wounds that are deeply entrenched in our souls. We will rebuild the Gaza Strip, relying on God first, then on the determination of our people. We will also rely on resources and capacities available to us and on the assistance

and support of our brothers and friends from around the world, who we trust will not disappoint you in supporting our economy and improving its lot and who will also support you in reclaiming a dignified life in your homeland and in lifting you out of this disastrous situation caused by this unjust war. Your plight has touched and shaken the world's conscience.

Mr. President, Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This conference, which convened at a critical and complex time and within extremely difficult conditions, highlighting the imperative link between the reconstruction and development of Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian national economy, with view to ensure balanced economic growth between all Palestinian localities. This goes to show an undisputable truth, that the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and 'East' Jerusalem constitute one single geographic whole, in which we seek the removal of 'the occupation.'

I would like to praise the support of our brothers in the Arab world and our friends across the world, and international governmental and non-governmental agencies who stood beside us and provided emergency humanitarian aid which went a long way in healing some of the wounds arising from this war. We will once again rely on you to rebuild what was destroyed in accordance with the plan prepared by our government. The plan clearly details the immense destruction in the Strip and its needs, which amount to approximately \$4 billion.

We reiterate here that the government will implement this plan in a responsible and transparent manner and will be implemented in full coordination with UN agencies, donor countries and international financial institutions, not to mention, effective cooperation with the private sector and civil society. The plan will be presented to you

later during the conference and I hope it will receive your support and attention.

We are certain of the regional and international political resolve to rally support and finances for the reconstruction of Gaza. We are confident that you will undertake your roles in financing the plan and supporting its implementation.

Mr. President, Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are proud of what we achieved in cooperation with you: Our brothers, partners and friends. You certainly know the devastating consequences of the continued occupation and colonization on the life of our people and on our economy. 'Palestine' is a promising economy for both investments and development of many promising sectors, in fact the sky is really the limit when it comes to 'Palestine.' Nonetheless, Israel's 'occupation and settlement activities' on the lands of the 'State of Palestine' deprive us from developing 60% of the West Bank lands and its natural resources, causing tremendous losses amounting to three billion dollars annually, according to a recent World Bank report.

Making use of these resources would certainly help us overcome the chronic deficit in the Palestinian government's budget and achieve a higher level of self-sufficiency.

As mentioned earlier, we worked with the international community for the past two decades on building and preparing the state's administrative, political, judicial, economic, and security institutions for a modern self-reliant state.

We have devised a modern regulatory framework, built the

required infrastructure and improved our medical and educational facilities among others. We have also established transparent oversight agencies. These efforts gained us the commendation of international financial institutions in their successive reports praising the respectable financial, administrative, and security performance of the government. We hope that you would continue your support for our efforts.

Mr. President, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Israeli government's failure to abide by the international terms of reference, UN resolutions, and its lack of respect for the two-state solution on the pre-1967 border, including a just and agreed upon resolution for the refugee problem in line with the Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed by the Beirut summit in 2002, as well as for Islamic conference summits, is leading to renewal of the cycle of conflict and violence.

What Jerusalem, al-Aksa Mosque and holy sites in general are subject to by Israeli 'settlers' and Israeli ministers with the purpose of imposing spatial and temporal division in 'East' Jerusalem, is like adding fuel to the fire in our region. A region that unfortunately is already witnessing increased and unprecedented extremism, sectarian and religious polarization, and transformation of the struggle from national to a religious one, threatening, the security, stability, and civil peace of the entire region.

In this context, international efforts to combat terrorism will not gain credence as long as our Palestinian people remain deprived of their freedom and independence.

We reiterate once again our constant position, we will fight all forms of terrorism and we stand firmly and strongly against all

extremist organizations, of any name or label. We are against anyone using our Islamic religion to further his terroristic plans.

Mr. President, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Israel's aggression on the Gaza Strip exposed the fragility and dangerous nature of the situation in our region in the absence of a just peace. International efforts stagger in their place and previous promises remain unfulfilled. Yet, despite all the pain and bitterness, we reiterate to everyone that we still firmly hold on to peace, and to all our obligations under international conventions, resolutions, and previously signed agreements.

It is imperative here to create a new international approach in solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

An approach that would end the Israeli 'occupation' and lead to the establishment of the independent state of 'Palestine' with its capital 'East' Jerusalem on the 1967 borders, living side by side with the state of Israel in security and good neighborly relations. A solution that would reflect the vision of two-states and the Arab Peace Initiative. Our Palestinian people and the entire region cannot take it anymore, while the region is on the verge of collapse.

The international community is called upon now more than any time before to support our bid to obtain a UN Security Council resolution that sets forth a time-ceiling for ending the 'occupation' and engaging in serious negotiations to solve all final status issues. This starts with delineation of the borders within a specific timeframe that is in line with our obligations towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace that guarantees security and stability for all peoples and countries in the region and contributes towards enhancing world peace and security.

Here, I think we have the right to wonder: has the time not come for our people to enjoy freedom, dignity, sovereignty, and independence in their own state? Is it too much to ask for, ladies and gentlemen? Has the time not come for righteousness and justice to prevail in 'Palestine?' Has the time not come for this historic injustice against our people to end?

It is no more acceptable to live repeated catastrophes, disasters, and wars, and demand reconstruction aid every two years?

The international community should undertake its responsibilities by preventing the aggression, destruction, displacement and suffering of our Palestinian people and supporting our demand in ending Israel's 'occupation' of our land and in realizing the vision of the two-state solution and the Arab peace initiative.

I thank you again and express high appreciation for your support and solidarity with 'Palestine,' the land, the people, and the cause. I wish the conference success in achieving its desired purpose, and express our utmost gratitude and appreciation for the efforts exerted to organize and convene it on this generous land, wishing it, its people, and its leadership more stability and prosperity.

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