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ARAB INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY UNION



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The 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference Damascus, 22- 24 July 2007

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

Under the high patronage of H.E. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, and in response to the invitation of the Syrian People's Assembly, the 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference was convened in Damascus during the period from 22 to 24 July 2007.

Delegations, representing African and Arab parliaments and parliamentary Assemblies from the following countries participated in this conference: Algeria, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Jordan, , Kuwait, Kenya, Lebanon, Morocco, Nigeria, Palestine, Qatar, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Somalia, Tanzania and Yemen.

Representatives of the following parliamentary organizations have also taken part in the conference as observers: the Arab League, the Transitional Arab Parliament, the Consultative Council of the Arab Maghrib Union and the Parliamentary Union of the OICM.

Opening Session

The opening session was convened in Ebla Al-Cham Hotel and was attended, in addition to the members of the participating delegations, by Mr. Mohammad Naji Otri, Prime Minister of Syria, Syrian Ministers, members of the diplomatic missions in Syria, and invitees and guests.

In the opening session, Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, Speaker of the Syrian People's Assembly, delivered a speech on behalf of H.E. President Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, patron of the conference. At the beginning of his speech, Dr. Al-Abrash conveyed the regards of President Al-Assad to the participants noting that this meeting which takes place under the current circumstances, is a true evidence that we do share, to a large extent, mutual concerns and face similar challenges. The speech underlined that Arab and African countries had suffered from the hegemony of colonialism which led to poverty, famines, backwardness, and a huge gap between the colonial powers and these countries. These powers continue to prevent these countries from bridging this gap. The colonialists, who were forced to leave our countries, left huge problems which led to tribal, ethnic, religious and territorial wars.

With regard to the current situation in the world, Dr. Al-Abrash mentioned that the existence of a unilateral system in the world has only led to chaos, conflicts and wars, as well as to a new form of contemporary colonization hidden under different names and pretexts but clear for its goals, which is the control of oil and wealth resources.

The speech stressed that there is a certain political plan that is currently being implemented against our countries and peoples under different titles such as: a Greater Middle East, combating terrorism or Weapons of Mass Destruction. All this created a systematic globalization that violates the sovereignty of states and the right of self-determination.

The speech paid attention to the suffering of both the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples and to the double standards through which the international legitimacy is implemented.

Dr. Al-Abrash touched upon the dangers threatening our planet, which are the outcome of climate change, global-warming and the huge stock of nuclear weapons, WMD's and other kinds.

With regard to Asia and Africa, the speech indicated that they both suffer from poverty, heavy debt burdens, diseases and the repercussions of colonization, as well as emigration, destructive wars, embargo, accusation policies, and recruitment of mercenaries and agents. The Speaker refuted the accusation of Arabs and Muslims of terrorism despite the tolerance which is a well known value in Islam, which called since its advent for equality, where there is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, or between a white and a black except through piety.

The speech stated the Syrian official stands towards a number of the issues in the region such as the occupation of Iraq to which Syria has stood against and supported resistance against occupation. It has also supported the struggle of Palestinian people, and will continue to support it until the liberation of the West Bank and Gaza, the completion of the establishment of the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and preservation of the right of return of refugees. He also stressed Syria's support for the Lebanese people for the protection of the Lebanese land and borders and restoration of security in Lebanon as a whole.

The Speaker stressed that the problems in both Africa and the Arab World are very similar and that the solution of such problems should stem from our countries' environments. He stated that Syria has always wanted just and comprehensive peace to restore the occupied land and rights in Palestine, Golan Heights, and Shaba'a Farms. That is the objective of our struggle in order to liberate the land in accordance with the international legitimacy and resolutions, especially resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of "Land for Peace".

In the closure of his statement, Dr. Al-Abrash wished the participants of the conferences full success in their deliberations.

Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, representative of the President of the African Parliamentary Union, delivered the Union's speech. He extended his thanks to the Syrian People's Assembly, presided by Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, for the warm welcome, reception and for the facilities provided for the participants and the conference. He said that parliamentarians are aware that African and Arab peoples

are linked together by ties of geographical, cultural and historical links. Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu added that we should not forget the financial and moral support of the Arab peoples in our struggle for liberation.

With regard to the circumstances of convening this conference, Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu stated that this conference is convened at a very crucial time where the two Arab and African regions witnessed a number of problems, and expressed the full support of the conference for the struggle of the Palestinian people and all efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and in Africa. He also clarified that the growing political and economic blocks at the international arena make it necessary to enhance cooperation between our two regions in order to meet the needs of our peoples through investing in the best utilization of our resources.

As for the conference topics, he stated that human development constitutes a concept, which integrates ideas driven from various concepts in the world of economy and focuses on the efforts to achieve economic growth which is usually a fruitful outcome of a healthy political, economic and social environment. Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu added that encouraging democracy, good governance and human rights is a strategic duty in the process of development that requires a kind of governance based on the rule of law and the protection of human rights. He also stated that legislators have a great role in achieving the goals of development and the new partnership for the development of Africa.

Engineer Abdul-Hadi El-Majali, President of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Jordan, greeted in his speech all the African and Arab participants stressing his support to every creative initiative that would widen the horizons of the Afro-Arab parliamentary cooperation and enhance the values of communication between the Arabs and their African brothers.

With respect to the current situation, Mr. El-Majali stated that it makes us feel upset, especially that the world is incapable of implementing the principles of international legitimacy and its resolutions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, or even of practicing a minimum pressure that guarantees a full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967, and preserves the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. He clarified that it is unjust to see the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Shaba' Farms in Southern Lebanon, the continuation of the tragic conditions in Iraq, and the expansion of the levels of poverty, disease and the poor living conditions for many of the Arab and African peoples.

Mr. El-Majali stressed the necessity for implementing justice and equity among the peoples, rejecting terrorism in all its forms, prohibiting the proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons, supporting the Arab Peace Initiative as being a balanced project for a historic peaceful solution of the conflict in the Middle East.

On the process of the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue, Mr. El-Majali called for institutionalising the dialogue in a way that ensures its continuation, follow-up, evaluation and documentation. He called for the institution of a secretariat capable of ensuring follow-up and implementation of the recommendations, ideas and opinions expressed in this dialogue, more particularly by moving into a more comprehensive framework that contributes to the promotion of investments, economic and technical exchanges. He concluded his speech by stressing that the continuation of Afro-Arab communication, and the success it realizes in achieving its goals, will grant us more of the world's respect and appreciation.

Mr. Nouredine Bouchkouj, the General Secretary of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, welcomed in his speech the Arab and African participants and extended his thanks to the President, the Parliament, the people and the government of Syria for the initiative to convene the 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference in its beautiful capital.

Mr. Bouchkouj stated that the convention of the conference represents the substantiation of the close relations which bring together both the African Parliamentary Union and Arab Inter-parliamentary Union. These relations go back to over twenty years, and they are a fulfillment of an objective need imposed by the international and regional developments, the new formulation of international relations under the new world order.

He indicated that the dialogue process has led to finding a clear rapprochement in view points and stances towards many international and regional events, and that we are in need for evaluating this process and activating it on all levels. He also called for putting a definite programme for joint activities to be carried out between the conferences in order to cancel the seasonal aspect of the dialogue meetings and its activities.

Mr. Bouchkouj concluded his speech by expressing his optimism about working to push forward the Afro-Arab relations to the levels aspired for.

The participants listened to the speeches delivered by the representatives of the organisations invited to attend the conference as observers. These speeches saluted the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue process and expressed hope in developing this process for the best interest of the Arab and African countries.

Working Sessions – Election of the Conference Bureau

At the beginning of the first working session, Mr. Degefe Bula, President of the Ethiopian Council of Federation, President of the 10th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference, welcomed the participants and extended his thanks to the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting the proceedings of the Conference. He stated that the statutes of the conference stipulate that the speaker of the parliament of the host country assumes the presidency of the conference. Consequently, he announced that Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, Speaker of the Syrian People's Assembly shall be entrusted with the presidency of the Conference.

Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash presided over the conference, the following two members were elected as Vice-President and rapporteur:

- Representative of the Parliament of Nigeria as Vice-President of the Conference,
- Representative of the Parliament of Sudan as rapporteur.

The conference approved its agenda which includes the following items:

1. Election of the members of the conference bureau
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Report of the follow-up committee

4. Exchanging views on the political, economic and social situation in the world and on the Afro-Arab cooperation and coordination.
5. Human development in Africa and the Arab countries: Reality and prospects.
6. Practical proposals for the activation of Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue.
7. Formation of the new follow-up committee.
8. Date and Venue of the 12th conference.
9. Supporting the request of the Palestinian National Council to obtain a full membership in the IPU.

Report of the follow up committee

The conference heard the report of the follow-up committee presented by the rapporteur of the committee. The report included a presentation of the conclusions of the committee meeting which considered the joint activities carried out by the two General Secretariats of the African Parliamentary Union and the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union during the period between the 10th and 11th conferences, through studying a report submitted by the two Secretariats. The committee approved the report. The conference expressed its appraisal of the activities of the follow-up committee and stressed the necessity for activating its activities in the future and the need for its participation in all the Afro-Arab parliamentary meetings.

On the other hand the Conference heard speeches of the speakers of parliaments and heads of the African and Arab parliamentary delegations. The speeches touched upon the current international situation from the political, economic and social perspectives, as well as on the two major items in the agenda: Human Development and the proposals for the activation of Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue.

Setting up of the New Follow Up Committee

The conference formed the new follow-up committee which will undertake to follow up the implementation of the Conference resolutions and recommendations during the period between the 11th Conference and the 12th Conference.

The committee was formed as follows:

From the African Side: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal. (In addition to Ghana as the President of the African Parliamentary Union).

From the Arab side: Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen. (in addition to Jordan as the President of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union).

The conference had also formed a drafting committee to prepare the draft of the Final Communiqué of the Conference. The committee included representative of the parliaments of the following countries:

Senegal, Gambia, Gabon, Sudan, Cameroon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco.

The drafting committee met and put the following recommendations, which it formulated taking into account the memoranda presented on the different agenda items, the speeches delivered in the opening session and the speeches of the speakers of parliaments and the delegations participating in the Conference.

Hereafter are the recommendations adopted by the Conference:

I. On the Situation in Africa

1. The conference stressed the importance of peace and stability in the African continent, in order to consolidate efforts in this respect for the interest of sustainable development and better standards of living for peoples.
2. The conference stresses the territorial integrity of Somalia, and calls all Somali parties to participate in the national reconciliation conference, presently convened in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The conference demands the Arab League and the African Union to provide the required support to achieve successful results in the reconciliation conference.
3. The conference confirms its support for the territorial integrity of Sudan and its people. As it notes improvement on the ground in Darfour, it calls for accelerating human relief efforts and considers that imposing sanctions or threatening to impose them constitutes an overt aggression against the rights of the people of Sudan. It also confirms its support for the efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive peace in Darfour through negotiations, and its full support for the efforts exerted by the African Union and the Arab League in this respect.
4. The conference also expresses its satisfaction for the stability of the situation and the gradual normalization of relations in the area of the Great Lakes and Central Africa.
5. The conference voices its concern at the phenomenon of illegal emigration of the African youth and calls for an Afro-Arab-European cooperation to find solutions to this phenomenon which has a particular impact on the economic level.
6. The conference expresses its concern at the aggravation of the problem of foreign debts and emphasizes the importance of the Afro-Arab economic cooperation that exceeds assistance and grants in order to directing part of the Arab investments into the vital fields in the African continent.
7. The conference expresses its welcome and support for the intention of Tanzania to obtain a full membership of the African Parliamentary Union and the Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference.

II. On the situation in the Middle East

1. The conference expresses its utmost denunciation and rejection of the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands in Palestine, Golan Heights, Shaba' Farms and Kafr Shouba in Lebanon, and the continuation of the occupation of Iraq, which leads to increasing the tensions in the Middle East.
2. The conference confirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle. It also confirms that peace will not be achieved in the region without the implementation of the international legitimacy resolutions, especially resolutions 242, 338, 194 and also the principle of "Land for Peace" which stipulates the Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, ensuring the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people in establishing their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return of refugees. The conference calls upon all Palestinian factions and groups to reject conflicts, to unify their lines and to adopt dialogue as the only way to solve their disputes.
3. The conference expresses its utmost condemnation of the arrest of the President and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council by the Israeli occupation forces, and calls on the international community, IPU and all the regional and international parliamentary organizations to make pressure on Israel to set them free as well as all the detainees and prisoners in the Israeli prisons.
4. The conference stresses its full support and respect for the independence and sovereignty of Iraq and the right of the Iraqi people in choosing their political system. It also calls for putting a timetable for the withdrawal of the occupation forces from Iraq and confronting terrorist acts which target civilians and religious figures. It further calls for convening a regional Iraqi conference, which should be supported regionally and internationally to initiate a dialogue among all the Iraqi strata.
5. The conference expresses its solidarity with the Lebanese people, and condemns the Israeli provocations, violations and terrorist acts launched against it. It also stresses the right of Lebanon in resisting and extending its authority over its national territory and further calls for supporting efforts exerted to help Lebanon in preserving its sovereignty, stability and enhancing its national unity. The conference urges all Lebanese people strata to continue dialogue in order to find a solution to the aggravated situation in a way that ensures stability in Lebanon, and urges all to offer help to rebuild Lebanon.
6. The conference declares its support to the right of the Syrian Arab Republic in restoring the occupied Golan Heights until the line of 4th June, 1967, in accordance with the international legitimacy stipulated in the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the Madrid Terms of reference which is based on the "Land for Peace" principle. The conference considers all resolutions

issued by Israel to annex the Golan Heights null and void. The conference also confirms its solidarity with Syria against the isolation attempts and the threatening and distortion campaigns, and rejects the imposition of any sanctions on it.

7. The conference calls for making the Middle East region a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and calls for putting the Israeli nuclear facilities under the surveillance of the International Atomic Energy Agency as they represent a danger that threatens security and stability in the region.

III. On Human Development

The conference calls for activating the existing institutions of economic and investment cooperation and increasing their role and efficiency with a view to pushing forward the Afro-Arab cooperation. It also stresses the importance and vitality of the following domains:

1. Cooperation in the legislative areas with a view to promoting the political, economic and social rights of the citizens.
2. Ensuring that the governments, in Africa and in Arab countries, adopt strategies focused on human development founded on the respect of human rights, good governance of public affairs and the fight against inequality and all forms of discrimination.
3. Taking steps to promote women participation in political and economical life.
4. Strengthening the contribution of the civil society and the private sector in development by involving them at every stage of the development process.
5. Laying down development and investment strategies to attain the Millennium Development Goals and realize the NEPAD objectives by ensuring notably, an increase in the public sector investments, strengthening capacity and the mobilization of the resources at the national, regional and international levels.
6. Creation of an Afro-Arab cooperation in the areas of agriculture, water, industry, public health, education, environment, science, technology, infrastructures and inter-trade.
7. Targeting common actions towards reducing infant mortality, especially by improving access to clean water and sanitation.
8. Participation in the implementation of universal primary education by 2015 in order to break the vicious circle of passing poverty from generation to another.

9. Promoting Afro-Arab partnership in the area of health through technical assistance and training and helping the countries build capacity in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other endemic diseases.
10. Creation of business propitious environment by instituting the rule of law, the fight against corruption so as to draw investments in both African and Arab countries.
11. Mobilizing, imperatively, the necessary resources and establish a regional and international partnership in order to implement the program of development.
12. Ensuring, in the allocation of the available financial resources, that priority is given to projects that have an impact on human development.
13. Support trade exchanges between Africa and the Arab world to encourage economic growth.
14. Coordinating Arab and African stances in the WTO trade negotiations in order to adopt trade policies that are consistent with the national strategies aimed at poverty reduction and the realization of the MDGs.

IV. On Practical Proposals to Activate the Process of Afro-Arab Parliamentary Dialogue

1. Seeking to institutionalize Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue, and asking the General Secretariats of the two Unions to provide a study regarding the possibility of transforming the Afro-Arab Parliamentary dialogue into a effective institution or organization.
2. Inviting regional and continental African parliamentary organizations to take part in the Afro-Arab parliamentarian conferences.
3. Setting up, within Arab and African national parliaments, of parliamentary friendship societies and specialized committees and activate those existing, in order to deal with Afro-Arab affairs, enhance bilateral relations, deepen convergence and exchange of experiences among parliamentarians from both sides.
4. Exchanging visits of delegations on bilateral level among Arab and African parliaments.
5. Organizing an Afro-Arab parliamentary symposium in the framework of the forthcoming 12th Conference or in the period between the 11th Conference and 12th conference on:
 - a. The challenges of globalization to national cultures and economies in Africa and the Arab world.
 - b. Democracy and reality: future outlook.
 - c. Good governance and its experiences.

6. Inviting African and Arab governments to expand diplomatic representation between the Arab and African countries and exchange embassies.
7. Improving the process of cooperation and coordination among Arab and African parliamentary delegations during the conferences of the IPU through:
 - a. Organizing a meeting between presidents of the two Unions or who may represent them during each conference for the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
 - b. Requesting the follow-up committee and the two Unions' secretariats to consider the agenda of every IPU conference and submit proposals with regard to issues that require cooperation and coordination among the representatives of the two groups in the conference.
 - c. Paying attention to cooperation and coordination on issues of mutual interest among the representatives of the two groups in the Executive Committee of the IPU, and in the meeting of women parliamentarians.
 - d. Participation of the General Secretaries of the two Unions in the coordinating meetings held by the delegations of each group before convening the IPU Conference.
 - e. Exchanging memorandums, working papers and proposals presented by each Union on issues under consideration in the bodies of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
 - f. The necessity of commitment in the conferences of the IPU to what is agreed on in the coordination meetings, especially during the voting processes.
 - g. The need to represent the follow-up committee in all Afro-Arab parliamentary meetings.
 - h. Extending the Afro-Arab parliamentary cooperation to include the regional parliamentary groups from both sides.

V. On Terrorism

The conference condemns terrorism in all its forms, including state's organized terrorism, strongly rejects linking terrorism to Islam and calls for distinguishing between terrorism and the struggle of the peoples to liberate their occupied territories and restore their legitimate rights. It also calls on all countries to closely cooperate in drying up the sources of terrorism, confront terrorism and refrain from giving shelter to terrorists or financing them. The conference calls for convening of an Afro-Arab conference under the auspices of the Arab League and the African Union to define terrorism and agree on certain mechanisms for combating it.

VI. On the Palestinian Request

The conference calls upon all Arab and African parliaments participating in the meeting of the IPU, specifically in the coming meeting in Geneva (October, 2007), to support the request of Palestine to obtain a full membership of the IPU.

VII. On The Next Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference

The conference welcomes the generous invitation of the parliament of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to convene the 12th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference in the city of Abuja during the month of January 2009.

Damascus, 24th July, 2007
