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THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES OF IRAQ, THE G8 AND CHINA**

H.E. Ahmed Aboul Gheit
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Let me join colleagues before me in thanking the host for a meeting well organized and for the warm reception and hospitality accorded to me and members of my delegation to this beautiful city of Sharm El Sheikh.

2. I had the opportunity of listening to many of our colleagues who had spoken eloquently on this important subject of Iraq - the way forward. Malaysia as the Chairman of the OIC Summit would like to add its voice in stating that we are here because we are together with the common people of Iraq in their aspiration for peace, security, freedom and prosperity. It is their hopes and aspiration to see their country can enjoy freedom which is essential for democracy to thrive and to enable the people to earn a living in an environment of peace and security. They believe strongly that the regime change will bring peace, freedom and prosperity to Iraq. Let us work together to not disappoint them.

3. So far, we have seen a lot of pains, sufferings and destruction. I hope we will be able to deliver in a tangible way, new hopes to them. I therefore hope and pray that the election can be held as announce by the government on 30 January 2005 where all segments of the Iraqi society will be able to participate in a fair, just and transparent election. It is important in our view that the common man, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or cultural background participate as Iraqis to determine their own future. Their diversities can be a source of strength rather than a source of division and deprivation. This is a necessary prerequisite for a united and sovereign Iraq, where territorial integrity is accepted by all.

4. We all agree that violence must end in order to bring normalcy to the country so as the political as well as the economic process can begin. I just would like to mention a note of caution on the issue of violence. I think we will make a fatal mistake if we just conclude that all acts of violence (which none of us support) are acts committed by terrorists. This would be too simplistic. It will not solve the problem confronting Iraq and its people.

5. In our view, it is equally important to address the question of the presence of foreign forces in their country. The earlier and a clearer timeline we have for their departure, the better it will be for the country. The security of Iraq must be the sole

responsibility of an independent and sovereign Iraq that fully controls its destiny and natural resources. I am not saying that the foreign forces had not done service to Iraq, but it is pertinent that it is not perceived as a continued occupation. The war had been won but we must make sure we can win the peace. We really like to see the spirit of dialogue, goodwill, understanding and reconciliation will bring the desired results. The continued instability and conflict in Iraq is not good for Iraq, the region, and the world at large.

Mr. Chairman,

6. The Communiqué has incorporated the objective of building a new Iraq that is responsible to its people and its neighbours. It is an important document reflecting our strong will and commitment to see Iraq return to normalcy and get out from the current predicament. But the more difficult task facing all of us is how to implement this into action that will translate hopes and expectations into real freedom, democracy and prosperity.

7. It is also imperative that measures implemented must not divide or marginalize any sections of the Iraqi society. The expressed will of the Iraqi people must be upheld and respected by all. We hope that any future government to be elected and thus mandated by the people would be truly seen as representative of the Iraqi population.

8. We hope that there will not be a repeat of the Abu Gharib or the scenes that have been portrayed on the assaults on Fallujah and in other cities of Iraq. I believe that the success of bringing about peace and stability in Iraq is, of course, ultimately dependent on the collective efforts of the Iraqi people themselves. Some painful decisions have to be made and there must be political will in respect of moving forward the process. What we wish to see is a united Iraq that is sovereign and its territorial integrity intact.

Mr. Chairman,

9. We must now act to ensure that peace and stability is restored in Iraq. The Iraqi population must have a sense of hope for the future. They must be convinced and assured of our genuine intention to assist them, free from the state of despair and hopelessness. The Iraqi population must feel that they are involved in this process and that their independence and freedom are assured.

10. The resort to the excessive use of force by all parties must be avoided because this would frustrate the process of achieving peace and eroding the confidence of the people. The desecration of places of worships, holy sites and other places of religious significance under whatever pretext must be stopped and the sanctity of these holy places should be maintained and respected at all times.

11. I would like to emphasize that in our efforts to address the security situation in Iraq, we have to be mindful that the actions which could further inflame the sense of anger, hatred and dissatisfaction among the population must be avoided. We must now act responsibly and judiciously in discharging our obligations. To this end, I cannot but reiterate yet again the vital role of the United Nations. It has to play the pivotal role, not only in the transition process, but also in the reconstruction of the country. We are keen to see that this objective is realized and the dignity of the Iraq people restored.

12. The very fact that the participation of the United Nations Secretary-General and the permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as the neighbouring countries of Iraq is a clear manifestation of all of us present here to see the people of Iraq live in peace and harmony. Our Meeting today is a clear testimony of the commitment and resolve to work together to contribute towards nation building and creating a new environment for Iraq to come back as a full fledged member of the international community it fully deserves. I hope the Iraqi government will prepare a comprehensive plan on the priority needs on rebuilding and reconstruction as soon as possible. This will help countries that are interested to participate to respond appropriately.

Mr. Chairman,

13. In conclusion, it is my fervent hope that the determination and pragmatism of the Iraqi people will win the day and be manifested in the emergence of a truly united independent Iraq where its people will live in peace and harmony.

Thank you.