Secretary-General, in Message to Meeting on United Nations-League of Arab States Cooperation, Calls Regional Body ‘Indispensable’ to Middle East Peace Efforts

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Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message, delivered by Taye-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to the thirteenth General Meeting of Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States, in Geneva today:

I am pleased to send greetings to the thirteenth General Meeting of Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States.  Responding to today’s challenges to international peace and security demands that our two organizations continue to strengthen and broaden our bilateral ties.  To that end, the recently prepared protocol of amendments to our 1989 cooperation agreement aims to enhance collaboration on conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, post-conflict capacity-building, humanitarian aid, human rights, refugees, election monitoring, disarmament and political issues.

Our collaboration is a tool for channelling practical, developmental and humanitarian support, as well as coordinating our international stance.  Developments in the Middle East, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Somalia show that a coordinated and effective response from the international community during a crisis — as well as before and after its most acute phase — is of the utmost importance.  The League of Arab States is indispensable to peace efforts in the region and in helping create an environment of trust.

Establishing lasting peace and security for Palestine and Israel based on the two-State solution has never been more urgent.  I welcome the League of Arab States’ efforts on this issue, particularly in promoting the Arab Peace Initiative.  I count on all League of Arab States members to continue to support this enormous task, particularly those who have pledged funding for Gaza’s reconstruction.

In Syria, I call on parties to the conflict to recommit immediately to the cessation of hostilities and to uphold their responsibility to protect civilians.  I look forward to negotiations resuming on a credible, inclusive and non-sectarian political transition based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué.

In Iraq, I hope the current political crisis can be resolved by reconvening Parliament soon, and confirming a Government willing and able to promote genuine reforms based on the constitution, the rule of law and the principles of democracy.

In Yemen, time is running out, as the country is becoming increasingly fragmented, and its people continue to suffer unimaginable hardships.  The United Nations is working with all parties to uphold the cessation of hostilities and reach agreement on a framework of principles, mechanisms and processes for the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement that will bring about a permanent end to the conflict.

In Libya, we continue to work to promote peace and stability.  The support of the League of Arab States has been essential in encouraging different factions to come to the negotiation table in the pursuit of reconciliation and compromise.

In Sudan, there is an urgent need to create a conducive environment for an inclusive and credible national dialogue that would address the root causes of conflict and pave the way for lasting peace.  I urge all parties, particularly the Government of Sudan, to take concrete steps to build confidence.  I also call on those who have not signed the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel Road Map Agreement to do so.  Implementing a cessation of hostilities, ensuring humanitarian access, and creating an enabling environment for democratic discourse are essential for reaching a lasting political settlement.

In Somalia, I commend the League of Arab States for its efforts and ask for your continued support in this politically decisive year to assist the country to address the many challenges on its agenda.

One issue high on my agenda is preventing violent extremism.  The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the need to address the drivers and root causes of conflict and violent extremism, including gross human rights violations, unaccountable institutions and poor governance.  I welcome the support of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States for my Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.  The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre is engaged in implementing a comprehensive programme of work at the national, regional and global levels, and the United Nations is working with the League of Arab States on programming issues that will make a difference on the ground in your member States.

I also feel strongly about the importance of empowering women.  We cannot realize our full potential to transform societies for the better if half of humanity continues to be held back.  The League of Arab States is in a unique position to advocate for greater equality and push for the implementation of existing regional commitments on women´s empowerment, including the 2014 Cairo Declaration and the 2015 League of Arab States action plan on women, peace and security.

I welcome this opportunity to exchange views, deepen our collaboration and strengthen our ties.  I wish you a successful meeting.