

AMR MOUSSA

Secretary-General of the League of Arab States

I am here to attend two meetings, this one and another called Forum for the Future. I am honoured to attend the world policy forum. We all know how complicated the world is and how complicated international relations are, especially at this stage. Coming from the Arab world, I believe that this is an occasion to speak about the situation in that troubled region. The issues you have debated deal with rationalising the work of the Security Council and the way international relations are conducted and led. No other region needs more help from a rational system and a more powerful Security Council than the Middle East.

That region is going through yet another period of concern, frustration, and trouble, but we continue to maintain hope, especially if we should succeed in defining the goals that we are aiming at. One of these is the attainment of a fair peace in the Palestinian question and an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and we are committed to that. The second goal should be to attain stability, security and prosperity in the region.

However, the agenda before us deals with several issues, not only the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also the very tense situation in several parts of the region, Yemen being the most recent to face a major problem, let alone the Sudan and Somalia, or Lebanon, which cannot form a government. Iraq continues to suffer from a fragile situation. Then there is the nuclear issue and the threat of a new conflagration in the region.

You will notice that both Iran and Turkey are playing an increasingly important role in the region. We welcome the return of Turkey to the Middle East, as we in the Arab world consider Turkey to be a full partner and a country to be reckoned with, and follow its policies with great interest. Turkey presents itself as a power broker, as a country that would benefit from peace and stability in the region and harmed if we cannot secure them. The Turkey of today and of the past both ring a lot of bells in people's minds, given the parallels between the Ottoman Empire and some religious groups and Ataturk and some liberal trends in the Arab world.

There is Iran on the other hand. Iran is a member of the Middle East family of nations, and it is there to stay. It did not arrive through invasion or aboard a ship. It is part of the Middle East, and we have to reach a general consensus on how to deal with the future of the region. Iran's policies are different to Turkey's. Turkey is a smooth operator when it comes to policy, whereas Iran's problem was created through its nuclear programme and other policies which have affected relations with its neighbours. We are glad that negotiations have resumed between Iran and the E6 countries, and also that it seems that certain progress has been achieved since 1 October, when the talks started. We are also glad that opinions are drafts are being exchanged. Therefore, perhaps we are seeing a new phase in relations between Iran and the rest of the world.



However, there are two points that must be made. First, any discussion about regional security should be between all of us. Iran cannot speak on behalf of all countries in the Middle East family of nations when it comes to regional security, as this is an issue that should be the subject of consensual policy. This has to happen, because regional security has to be tackled in the near future, and I have told our colleagues in Iran that it is for all of us to discuss it and to see how we will deal with the future from that perspective.

Regarding the nuclear issue, our position is clear. The Middle East does not need strategic nuclear programmes, whether in Iran, in Israel or in any other country. Therefore, the only solution is to establish a zone in the Middle East that is free of nuclear weapons, and all countries should adhere to it. We are still unable to understand the difference between a bad and a good nuclear programme. There will be an arms race in the region if we leave this situation to continue as it is, so we need to address it properly in a positive, objective and fair way. We do not need military nuclear programmes in the region, and we hope that the next conference about the NPT in New York next May will reaffirm the necessity of establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.

It goes without saying that peaceful uses of nuclear energy are the right of all those who joined the NPT, including Iran. We will have to engage in a very thorough debate with our neighbours in Western Asia, North Africa, the Mediterranean and Southern Europe in order to tackle that very sensitive question. Can we do this while the Arab-Israeli conflict is still underway? I believe that we have to wait for a sure sign of progress in a viable peace process. This cannot be just any peace process, as we have had to sit through vicious circle after vicious circle. We need a viable and certain process with a timeframe and with a positive environment, meaning that you cannot negotiate and at the same time change the demographics the geographical characteristics or the legal status of the surrounding territories.

What we need is a peace process that would bring the parties together around an agenda that can be negotiated and that would lead us to peace. We have been proposing the Arab Initiative since 2002, and in that proposal we put forward the commitment to normalise relations with Israel if Israel makes the commitment to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state and to negotiate sincerely about the fate of refugees and the status of Jerusalem. We are committed to that, and we will continue to search for peace. Here I wish to commend American policy, and President Obama in particular, for showing an interest in reaching peace. We continue in our willingness to help American diplomacy to achieve something that nobody should refuse.

We cannot just sit around while someone claims credit for having brought the two sides together. They have sat together for several years already, but to no avail. I still believe that President Obama will succeed in the end, and we are ready to help, though not through free concessions to Israel without assurance that they will take a step forward for every step forward we take. The days have gone when we believed in promises, and we have heard all that by now. Any offer has to be precise and to be in writing. Any peace process has to have a timeframe, an agenda, a monitoring mechanism and a follow-up mechanism. Those are all things that were absent in the last few rounds of negotiations, and that is why they failed.

Ladies and gentlemen, the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a *sine qua non* for the solution of other problems. However, the political and security issues are not the only ones that have priority on our agenda. The reform of Arab societies is one of the items on the agenda of the Arab League, and we have stressed the point that we now live in a new century, and in a new way of international relations. The Arab world has to link up with the 21st century. We have to move in accordance with an agenda of modernisation and of change, towards democracy, women's rights, human rights in general, education, and economic and social rights as a whole.

We have moved in this direction, slowly perhaps, but we are not stationary. Everybody is talking about education and how to modernise it in order to have better outcomes from our educational system. The most important steps in order for Arab societies to achieve progress are the subject of a consensus between all of us. We know that there are forces that would pull us back, and there are forces that keep us busy, but reform is of equal importance with the political and security agendas.

The third issue to which I will refer is the so-called clash of civilisations. I recognise that there is a clash of civilisations, but it is a clash between the extreme wings of all civilisations. There is no clash in the mainstream. However, the clash has to come to an end. We do not only have extremists on our side. We have heard and read a lot about the other civilisation and the other religion, and the time has come for us to make the Alliance of Civilisations prevail over the clash of civilisations. The Alliance of Civilisations, as you know, is the initiative of the prime ministers of Spain and Turkey, and the Arab League is very active in that project.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Arab-Israeli conflict has to come to an end so that we can have stability and security in the region, and so that the conflict can come to an end, the settlement has to be fair. It cannot and will not be a biased one. Peace has to be fair and just, and under those conditions there will be a place for Israel in the Middle Eastern family of nations. This place cannot be offered if Arab territories continue to be occupied, if Palestinians continue to suffer under occupation, and if people in Gaza are attacked in the way that Professor Goldstone has underlined.

Therefore, we need to move on in accordance with international law. I was asked the other day, 'what about the territory that was promised by God?' There is one way to deal with territory, and that is international law, not God. We are ready to abide by international law, and we call on Israel to abide by and respect international law. This is the sure road towards peace and towards the end of a very long conflict which all of us want to see come to an end.

We called an economic summit in January this year in Kuwait, and we came up with ideas, resolutions and projects. One of them was to establish a fund to help small and medium-sized businesses in the amount of USD2 billion, and we are now about to launch it. The second was to link up the whole Arab world, via projects already launched, with a road and railway network. The third was to sit together and go through the primary and secondary educational curricula. The Arab League is doing all of this at the moment. Therefore, inasmuch as we are busy with the question of how to reach peace, we are also busy with rebuilding societies, in order to move on and link up, so as to be part of and play a leading role in the new international system.