Aboul Gheit's address at the opening of the Fifth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit

17 May 2025

Your Excellency Prime Minister Mohammed Shia’ Al-Sudani

Prime Minister,

Chairman of the Fifth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Your Excellency on Iraq’s assumption of the presidency of the Fifth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit. I wish you every success in steering our joint Arab development agenda over the coming four years.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Republic of Lebanon for its leadership of the Fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, and for its prudent and effective management of its work throughout the preceding period.

Mr. President,

The rapid and far-reaching global developments unfolding today render the convening of this summit both timely and necessary. The global economy is currently navigating a period of profound volatility and uncertainty. International trade is contending with unprecedented disruptions, while a surge in protectionist tendencies and economic insularity is challenging the very principles upon which globalisation has rested for decades.

In light of these dynamics, we are witnessing a marked shift towards regional integration as a strategic response to the erosion of global multilateral mechanisms. It is incumbent upon our Arab nations to respond proactively to these transformations—through cohesive visions and coordinated strategies. Deepening integration and enhancing coordination across all economic sectors is no longer a matter of optional cooperation or the pursuit of optimal benefit; rather, it is a strategic imperative to safeguard Arab interests in an era of mounting risks and compounding challenges.

In this regard, allow me to briefly highlight a number of critical issues featured on the agenda of this summit:

First: Arab food security has emerged as a paramount priority for the Arab region and the international community at large. The succession of global crises in recent years has intensified vulnerabilities within global food supply systems, exposing stark deficiencies in their resilience and equity. These developments have underscored the urgency of strengthening Arab food security. Before your summit today is a draft Comprehensive Arab Strategy for Food Security—a framework presented for your endorsement and guidance on the implementation of its mechanisms and programs.

Moreover, the summit will consider the valuable initiative put forth by the Republic of Iraq on achieving Arab food security, with a particular focus on securing grain supplies—an initiative that merits our full support.

Second: The Republic of Iraq has proposed the establishment of a Specialised Ministerial Council for Arab Trade, operating within the institutional framework of the League of Arab States and composed of Arab trade ministers. The initiative aims to reinforce intra-Arab trade frameworks and facilitate economic exchange among Arab nations. Against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions, the proliferation of trade disputes, and the potential disruption of global supply chains in food and energy, coordinated Arab action is not merely advisable—it is essential. This Council would serve as a platform for harmonising positions, protecting the Arab region from the spillover effects of global trade fragmentation, and safeguarding our shared economic future.

Third: The initiative proposed by His Excellency President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, on the Blue Economy represents a visionary and timely contribution to resolving the intertwined crises of food and energy. This initiative reflects a strategic perspective on development, rooted in the sustainable and optimal utilisation of marine and aquatic resources. It calls for investment in the untapped potential of Arab countries endowed with significant blue economy assets, thereby laying a foundation for new, environmentally responsible growth pathways.

Fourth: The initiative I have launched under the title: "The Arab Artificial Intelligence Initiative: Towards Technological Leadership and Sustainable Development." The initiative seeks to advance Arab leadership in the field of artificial intelligence by fostering regional research and development, encouraging innovation, and promoting the integration of AI into key sectors of our economies. I am firmly convinced that bridging the technological gap between the Arab world and the global forefront is not merely an option—it is an urgent priority that must be addressed if we are to achieve true, sustainable economic progress.

Mr. President,

Arab national security is a comprehensive construct—one that cannot be realised in isolation, but only through the integration of all its dimensions: food security, health care, education, water and energy security, cybersecurity, and societal stability.

Indeed, the League of Arab States, as envisioned by its founding fathers eighty years ago, was established as a platform for coordination and deepening cooperation among Arab states across precisely these areas. I take this opportunity to reiterate the imperative of strengthening the League’s capabilities—particularly in the economic and social domains—and of enabling its specialised agencies to assume active, impactful roles in the region’s development and modernisation processes. Our strategies are in place, collective frameworks are prepared, and Arab expertise is available. What remains is to galvanise the collective political will necessary to translate these plans into reality and these programmes into tangible achievements.

Mr. President,

Our Arab societies are among the youngest globally—a demographic asset that presents a historic opportunity. However, this opportunity could quickly transform into a burden if not addressed with foresight and urgency. The only viable path forward lies in reforming our educational systems to align with contemporary realities and implementing dynamic, future-oriented training programmes that meet the demands of the labour market.

Today, our region finds itself at a defining crossroads. Palestine is enduring relentless and brutal aggression, while other Arab countries face existential threats that deplete their capacities and jeopardise their futures. Amid these adversities, we remain resolute in our mission to build a better tomorrow—for our children, so they may never be seduced by despair or fall prey to the forces of darkness and destruction. This is the defining battle of our era: the battle for development, progress, and dignity. We will prevail only through the synergy of our collective capabilities and the unity of our vision.

For our goal is one, our pain is shared, and—God willing—our word shall remain united and strong.

Thank you.

May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you.