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**The address of Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-
General of the League of Arab States, at the
inauguration of the Fourth Baghdad International
Water Conference
Baghdad: 28 April 2024**



Your Excellency Engineer Muhammad Shiaa Al-Sudani,
Premier of the Republic of Iraq,
Your Excellency Engineer Aoun Dhiab Abdullah,
Minister of Water Resources,
Your Excellencies,

It is a pleasure for me to join you today at the inauguration of the fourth edition of the Baghdad International Water Conference, hosted here in the historic capital of Mesopotamia. This land, named after its two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, holds significance as one of the cradles of early civilisations, where communities flourished along the riverbanks. These rivers endowed this region with its distinctiveness and established a fundamental principle that has echoed through civilisations: without water, there can be no prosperity, success, or creativity for humanity.

Allow me to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Iraqi government for spearheading the initiative to launch this conference in 2021 and for its commitment to its annual convening ever since. This gathering serves as a crucial platform for deliberating the water-related challenges confronting Iraq and devising sustainable solutions. The League of Arab States reaffirms its unwavering support for this conference, pledging to collaborate closely to enrich its outcomes. We firmly believe in the paramount importance of the water issue and its pivotal role in shaping the future of all Arab nations.

I am confident that this conference will successfully fulfil its objectives by providing a comprehensive assessment of Iraq's water situation, encompassing its myriad challenges and complexities. By fostering dialogue among all relevant stakeholders, including national sectors, neighbouring countries, and international partners, we aim to deepen our understanding of these challenges and forge effective strategies to address them.

In this context, despite the significant efforts exerted by the Iraqi government and the substantial investments and projects implemented in recent years, the water situation continues to face



escalating pressure. This isn't due to any shortcomings in the effectiveness of achievements or the dedication of efforts, but rather stems from various contributing factors. These include the diminishing share of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers allocated to Iraq, prolonged periods of drought, population growth, and the intensifying impacts of climate change.

On the broader Arab level, we are all cognizant of the collective challenges confronting Arab nations in the realm of water management, compounded by the unique challenges certain countries face due to their geographical circumstances. Notably, a staggering 80 percent of water resources in Arab countries originate from outside their borders, as many are situated along the basins of transboundary rivers. This underscores the imperative for regional cooperation and coordination in water distribution and preservation, particularly among nations such as Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Sudan.

The water issue transcends mere technical and developmental concerns in our country; it is fundamentally an existential matter in every sense of the term. It is intricately linked to Arab national security and the imperative of long-term survival. Addressing this issue necessitates not only concerted efforts across all sectors at the national level but also honest and continuous collaboration at the regional level.

The neighbouring Arab countries—Turkey and Iran in relation to Iraq and Syria, and Ethiopia concerning Egypt and Sudan—must adopt a fresh approach to addressing water issues. This approach should be founded on mutual interest, moving away from zero-sum equations, and recognising that water capabilities and resources can be harnessed to benefit all peoples and foster the development of nations. Cooperation and mutual understanding should take precedence over competition or the monopolisation of resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Water security is intrinsically linked to food security. Recent times have witnessed an unprecedented focus on food security, prompted by disruptions in global supply chains following the Covid-19



pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. Additionally, the accelerating impacts of climate change and the growing frequency of natural disasters have underscored the urgency of addressing this issue. Recognising its paramount importance, food security has received dedicated attention and remains a priority in joint Arab efforts. The Arab Summit in Algeria in 2022 endorsed several strategies pertaining to Arab food security, complemented by ongoing efforts by specialised organisations such as the Arab Ministerial Council for Water and the Arab Ministerial Council for Agriculture. These bodies, in which the Republic of Iraq plays an active and influential role, serve as vital platforms for collaborative action and decision-making.

On a related note, I wish to underscore the importance of bolstering capabilities in natural disaster preparedness and early warning systems in the upcoming period. Statistics reveal that 53 percent of natural disasters recorded in 2023 were water-related. As you know, the majority of the Arab population resides in coastal cities or along riverbanks, such as here in Iraq, the risks associated with water-related hazards have become all too real.

We have witnessed firsthand the devastating human and economic toll inflicted by torrential rains and floods, as seen in Sudan, Derna (Libya), Oman, and the Emirates in recent times. While I commend the strides made by Arab countries in disaster risk management and the implementation of proactive measures, I urge our governments to prioritise the enhancement of national capabilities in this domain. Additionally, I call for greater efforts to strengthen the Arab Coordination Mechanism for Disaster Risk Reduction, operating under the auspices of the League of Arab States.

It is worth noting that the League of Arab States is represented in the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council. As part of its involvement in organising various activities of this conference, the League will host a high-level dialogue session titled "Challenges of Water Disaster Risk Reduction in the Arab Region" in collaboration with several partners.

In conclusion, I extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful preparation of this important conference, which



delves into an issue crucial for shaping and preparing for the future.
I wish the conference every success in its endeavours.
Thank you.