



**UNION INTER-PARLEMENTAIRE ARABE
UNION PARLEMENTAIRE AFRICAINE**



**The 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference
Damascus, 22- 24/7/2007**

Final Communiqué

Under the honorable patronage of HE Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, and in response to the invitation of the Syrian Assembly of People, the 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference convened in Damascus, 22-24/7/2007. Delegations from the following countries, representing African and Arab parliaments and councils, have participated in this conference: Ethiopia - Jordan – Central Africa – Bahrain - Burkina Faso – Burundi – Benin – Tanzania - Algeria - Rwanda – Saudi Arabia – Senegal – The Sudan – Syria – Somalia – Gabon – Gambia – Ghana – Palestine – Qatar – Cameroon – Kuwait – Kenya – Lebanon – Liberia – Egypt – Morocco – Nigeria – Yemen.

Representatives of the following parliamentary organizations have also take part in the conference as observers: The Arab League – Interim Arab Parliament – Council of Counselors of the Arab Maghrib Union – Union of the Councils of member countries of OIC.

Opening Session

The opening session was convened in Ebla Al-Cham Hotel and was attended, in addition to the members of the participating delegations, by Mr. Muhammad Naji Otri, Prime Minister of Syria, a number of Syrian Ministers, members of the diplomatic missions in Syria, and a number of invitees and guests.

In the opening session, Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, Speaker of the Syrian Assembly of People, delivered a speech on behalf of President Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic and the patron of the conference. At the beginning of his speech, Dr. Al-Abrash conveyed the regards of President Asad to the participants noting that the meeting under the current circumstances is true evidence that we do share mutual concerns and face similar challenges. The speech made clear that Arab and African countries had suffered from the hegemony of occupation which led to poverty, famines, backwardness, and a huge gap between the imperial forces and us. These forces have continued to prevent us from bridging the gap. After these forces were forced to leave these countries, they left huge problems which led to tribal, ethnic, religious and territorial wars.

With regard to the current situation in the world, Dr. Al-Abrash mentioned that the existence of a unilateral system in the world has only led to chaos, conflicts and wars and to a new form of contemporary occupation hidden under different names and pretexts but clear for its goals, which is to control the oil and wealth resources.

The speech stressed that there is a certain political plan that is being implemented against our countries and peoples under different titles such as: a Greater Middle East, New Middle East, combating terrorism or Weapons of Mass Destruction.

All this created a systematic globalization that violates the sovereignty of states and the right of self-determination.

The speech paid attention to the suffering of both the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples and to the double standards through which the international legitimacy is implemented.

Dr. Al-Abrash touched upon the dangers threatening our planet, which are the outcome of climate change, global heating and the huge stock of nuclear weapons, WMDs and other kinds.

With regard to Asia and Africa, the speech indicated that they are suffering from poverty, heavy debt burdens, diseases and occupation repercussions as well as the emigration of minds, destructive wars, embargo, accusation policies, and recruitment of mercenaries and agents. The Speaker refuted the accusation of Arabs and Muslims with terrorism despite the tolerance which is well known for Islam, which calls from its beginning for equity where there is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab, or between a white and a black except through piety.

The speech stated the Syrian official stands towards a number of the issues in the region such as the occupation of Iraq. Dr. Al-Abrash said that Syria stood against the occupation of Iraq, supported the resistance against occupation and the struggle of Palestinian people, and will always support it until the liberation of the West Bank and Gaza, establishment of the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and maintaining the right of return of refugees. He also echoed Syria's support for the Lebanese people for the protection of the Lebanese land and borders and restoration of security in Lebanon as a whole.

The Speaker stressed that the problems in both Africa and the Arab World are very similar where the solution of such problems should stem from our countries' environments. He stated that Syria has always wanted just and comprehensive peace to restore the occupied land and rights in Palestine, Golan Heights, and Shaba'a Farms. That is the objective of our struggle in order to liberate the land in accordance with the international legitimacy and resolutions, especially resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of "Land for Peace".

In his closing statement, Dr. Al-Abrash wished the participants all the success in their conferences.

Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, representative of the President of the African Parliamentary Union, delivered the union's speech where he extended his thanks to the

Syrian Assembly of People, presided by Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, for the warm welcoming, reception and facilities provided for the participants and the conference. He said that parliamentarians are aware that the African and Arab peoples are linked together by ties of geographical, cultural and historical links. Mr. Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu added that we should not forget the financial and moral support of the Arab peoples in our struggle for liberation.

With regard to the circumstances of convening this conference, Mr. Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu stated that this conference is convened in a very crucial time where the two Arab and African regions witnessed a number of problems, and expressed the full support of the conference for the struggle of the Palestinian people and all efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and in Africa. He also clarifies that the growing political and economic blocks at the international arena make it necessary to enhance cooperation between our two regions in order to meet the needs of our peoples and the best investments of our resources.

As for the conference topics, he stated that human development constitutes a concept, which integrates ideas driven from various concepts in the world of economy and focus on the efforts to achieve economic growth which is usually a fruitful outcome of a healthy political, economic and social environment. Mr. Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu added that encouraging democracy, good governance and human rights is a strategic duty in the process of development that requires a kind of governance based on the authority of law and protection of human rights. He said also that legislators have a great role in achieving the goals of development and the new partnership for the development of Africa.

Engineer Abdul-Hadi El-Majali, President of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, Speaker of the House of Deputies of Jordan, greeted in his speech all the African and Arab participants stressing his support for every creative initiative that would widen the horizons of the Afro-Arab parliamentary cooperation and enhance the communication between the Arabs and their African brothers.

With respect to the current situation, Mr. El-Majali stated that it makes us feel upset, especially that the world is incapable of implementing the principles of international legitimacy and its resolutions related to Arab-Israeli conflict or even practicing a minimum pressure that guarantees a full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967, and approves the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. He clarified that it is unjust to see the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Shaba' Farms in Southern Lebanon, the continuation of the tragic conditions in Iraq, and the expansion of the levels of poverty, sickness and bad living conditions for many of the Arab and African peoples.

Mr. El-Majali stressed on the necessity for implementing justice and equity among nations, rejecting terrorism with all its different forms, stopping the proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, supporting the Arab Peace Initiative as being a balanced project for a historic peaceful solution of the conflict in the Middle East.

On the process of the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue, Mr. El-Majali called for institutionalising the dialogue in a way that ensures its continuation, following up, evaluation and documentation. This is to be done by establishing a general secretariat to follow up and activate the recommendations, ideas and opinions expressed in this dialogue by moving into a more comprehensive framework that contributes to the promotion of investment, economic and technical exchanges. He concluded that the continuation of the Afro-Arab communication, and its success in achieving its goals, will grant us more of the world's respect, appreciations and positive attention.

Mr. Nouredin Boshkouj, the General Secretary of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, welcomed in his speech the Arab and African participants and extended his thanks to Syria, President, parliament, people and government for the initiative to convene the 11th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference in its beautiful capital.

Mr. Boshkouj stated that the convention of the conference represents the substantiation of close relations which link between both the African Parliamentary Union and Arab Inter-parliamentary Union. These relations go back to over twenty years, and they are a fulfillment of an objective need imposed by the international and regional developments, the new formulation of international relations under the new global system.

He indicated that the dialogue process has led to finding a clear rapprochement in view points and stances towards many international and regional events, and that we are in need for evaluating this process stage and activating it on all levels. He also called for putting a definite programme for the joint activities between the conferences to cancel the seasonal aspect off the dialogue meetings and its activities.

Mr. Boshkouj concluded his speech by expressing his optimism by working to push forward the Afro-Arab relations to the levels aspired for.

The participants listened to the speeches of the representatives of the observing organisations invited to attend the conference. These speeches saluted the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue process and expressed hope in developing this process for the best interest of the Arab and African countries.

Work Sessions – Election of the Conference Bureau

At the beginning of the first work session, Mr. Degefe Bula, President of the Federal Ethiopian Council, President of the 10th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference, welcomed the participants and extended his thanks to the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting the proceedings of the conference. He clarified that the statutes of the conference stipulate that the speaker of the hosting country's parliament be the chairman of the conference. He announced Dr. Mahmoud Al-Abrash, Speaker of the Syrian Assembly of People, as chairman of the conference.

After Dr. Al-Abrash preside the conference, the following two members were elected:

- Representative of the Nigerian Parliament as deputy chairman of the conference
- Representative of the National Council of the Sudan as rapporteur.

It was also agreed on the conference programme which includes the following items:

- 1- Election of the conference bureau
- 2- Approval of the program
- 3- Report of the follow up committee
- 4- Exchanging views on the political, economic and social conditions in the world as well as the Afro-Arab cooperation and coordination.
- 5- Human development in Africa and the Arab countries: Reality and Horizons.
- 6- Practical suggestions to activate the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue process.
- 7- Setting up the new follow up committee.
- 8- Date and Venue of the 12th conference.
- 9- Supporting the demand of the Palestinian National Council for full membership in the IPU.

Report of the follow up committee

The conference listened to the report of the follow up committee which was presented by the committee rapporteur. The report included a presentation of the committee meeting which considered the joint activities of the general secretariats of the African Parliamentary Union and the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union during the period between the 10th and 11th conferences, through studying a report submitted by the two secretariats. The committee approved the report. The conference expressed its evaluation of the activities of the follow up committee and stressed the necessity for

activating its activity in the future and its participation in all the Afro-Arab Parliamentary Meetings.

The participants listened also to the presentations of the speakers of parliaments and heads of the Afro-Arab parliamentary delegation. The presentations touched upon the current international situation on the political, economic and social levels as well as the two major items in the programme of the human development and the suggestions to activate the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue process.

Setting up the New Follow Up Committee

The conference set up the new follow up committee which will follow up the implementation of the conference resolutions and recommendations in the period between the 11th and the 12th conferences.

The committee was formed as follows:

From the African Side: Nigeria – Ethiopia - Senegal - Burkina Faso — Burundi. (In addition to Ghana as the president of the African parliamentary union).

The Arab side: Bahrain- Syria – Kuwait – Lebanon – Yemen. (in addition to Jordan as the presidency of the Union).

The conference formed a committee to prepare the final communiqué. The committee included representative of the parliaments of the following countries:

Senegal – Gambia – Gabon – The Sudan – Cameron – Syria – Saudi Arabia – Egypt – Algeria – Morocco

The committee met and put the recommendations which it formulated in accordance with the presented memoranda on the items of the programme and the speeches delivered in the opening session and the presentations of the speakers of parliaments and the participating delegations.

Hereafter is a list of what the conference approved:

I – On the Situation in Africa

- 1- The conference stressed the importance of peace and stability in the African continent in order to consolidate efforts for the interest of sustainable development and better standards of living for peoples.

- 2- The conference stresses the territorial integrity of Somalia, and calls all the Somali parties to participate in the national reconciliation conference, convened at present in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. It demands the African Union and the Arab League to provide the required support to achieve successful results in the reconciliation conference.
- 3- The conference confirms its support for the territorial integrity of the people of Sudan. As it notes improvement on ground in Darfour, it calls for accelerating the human relief efforts and considers that imposing sanctions or threatening to impose them constitute an overt aggression against the rights of the people of Sudan. It also confirms its support for the efforts that aim at achieving comprehensive peace in Darfour through negotiations, and its full support for the efforts exerted by the African Union and the Arab League in this respect.
- 4- The conference also expresses its satisfaction for the stability of the situation and the gradual normalization of relations in the area of the Great Lakes and Central Africa.
- 5- The conference voices its concern at the phenomenon of illegitimate emigration of African young men and calls for an Afro-Arab-European cooperation to find solutions for it, which focus on the economic aspect in particular.
- 6- The conference expresses its concern at the aggravation of the foreign debts problem and emphasizes the importance of the Afro-Arab economic cooperation that exceeds assistance and grants to directing part of the Arab investments into the vital fields in the African continent.
- 7- The conference expresses its support and welcome for the request by Tanzania to get the full membership of the African Parliamentary Union and the Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference.

II – On the situation in the Middle East

- 1- The conference expresses its utmost denunciation and rejection of the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands in Palestine, Golan Heights, Shaba' Farms and Kafr Shouba in Lebanon, and the continuation of the occupation of Iraq, which increases the tensions in the Middle East.

- 2- The conference confirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its legitimate struggle. It also confirms that peace will not be achieved in the region if the parties do not implement the international legitimacy resolutions, especially resolutions 242, 338, 194 and the principle of “Land for Peace” which stipulates the Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, ensure the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people in establishing their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital and the right of refugees return. The conference calls upon all Palestinian factions and groups to reject conflicts, to unify their lines and to adopt dialogue as the only way to solve their disputes.
- 3- The conference expresses its utmost condemnation of the arrest of the chairman and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council by the Israeli occupation forces, and demands the international community, IPU and all the regional and international parliamentary organizations to practice pressure on Israel to set them free as well as all the detainees and prisoners in the Israeli prisons.
- 4- The conference stresses its full support and respect for the independence and sovereignty of Iraq and the right of the Iraqi people in choosing their political system. It also calls for putting a timetable for withdrawing the occupation forces from Iraq and confronting terrorist acts which target civilians and religious figures. It further calls for convening a regional Iraqi conference which should be supported regionally and internationally to initiate a dialogue among all the Iraqi strata.
- 5- The conference expresses its solidarity with the Lebanese people, and condemns the Israeli provocations, violations and terrorist acts which are launched against it. It also stresses the right of Lebanon in resisting and extending its authority over its national land, and calls for supporting the efforts exerted to help Lebanon in preserving its sovereignty, stability and enhancing its national unity. The conference urges all Lebanese people strata to continue dialogue in order to find a solution to the aggravated situation in a way that ensures stability in Lebanon, and motivates all to offer help to rebuild Lebanon.
- 6- The conference announces its support to the right of the Syrian Arab Republic in restoring the occupied Golan Heights until the line of 4th June, 1967, in accordance with the international legitimacy stipulated by the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the Madrid Terms of reference which is based on the “Land for Peace” principle. The conference considers all resolutions issued by Israel to annex the Golan Heights null and void. The conference also confirms its solidarity with Syria against the attempts of isolation and threatening and distortion campaigns, and rejects imposing any sanctions on it.

- 7- The conference calls for making the Middle East a zone free from all WMD, including Nuclear Weapons, and calls for putting the Israeli Nuclear facilities under the surveillance of the International Atomic Energy Agency for the danger that threatens security and stability in the region.

III- On Human Development

The conference calls for activating the existing institutions of economic and investment cooperation and increasing their role and efficiency in order to take the Afro-Arab cooperation to the stage of execution. It also stresses the importance and vitality of the following domains:

- 1- Cooperate in the legislative areas to promote the political, economic and social rights of the citizens.
- 2- Ensure that the governments, in Africa and in Arab countries, adopt strategies focused on human development founded on the respect of human rights, good management of public affairs and the fight against inequality and all forms of discrimination.
- 3- Take steps to promote women participation in political and economical life.
- 4- Strengthen the contribution of the civil society and the private sector in the development by involving them at every stage of the development process.
- 5- Draw development and investment strategies to attain the Millennium Development Goals and realize the NEPAD objectives by ensuring notably, an increase in the public sector investment, strengthening capacity and the mobilization of the resources at the national, regional and international levels.
- 6- Create an Afro-Arab cooperation in the areas of agriculture, water, industry, public health, education, environment, science, technology, infrastructures and inter-trade.
- 7- Target common actions aimed at reducing infant mortality, especially by improving access to clean water and sanitation.
- 8- Take part in the implementation of universal primary education by 2015 in order to break the vicious circle of passing poverty from generation to another.

- 9- Promote Afro-Arab partnership in the area of health through technical assistance and training and helping the countries build capacity in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other endemic diseases.
- 10- Create a business propitious environment by instituting the rule of law, the fight against corruption so as to draw investments in both African and Arab countries.
- 11- Mobilize, imperatively, the necessary resources and establish a regional and international partnership in order to implement the program of development.
- 12- Ensure, in the allocation of the available financial resources, that priority is given to projects that have an impact on human development.
- 13- Support trade exchanges between Africa and the Arab world to encourage economic growth.
- 14- Coordinate Arab and African stances in the WTO trade negotiations in order to adopt trade policies that are consistent with the national strategies aimed at poverty reduction and the realization of the MDGs.

IV – On Practical Suggestions to Activate the Afro-Arab Parliamentary Dialogue Process

- 1- Seeking to institutionalize the Afro-Arab parliamentary dialogue, and asking the general secretariats of the two unions to provide a study regarding the possibility of changing the Afro-Arab Parliamentary dialogue into an institution or an active organization.
- 2- Inviting the regional and continental African parliamentary organizations to take part in the Afro-Arab parliamentary conferences.
- 3- Setting up parliamentary friendship societies and specialized committees that are concerned with the Afro-Arab affairs inside Arab and African parliaments for enhancing bilateral relations, deepening convergence and exchanging experiences among parliamentarians from both sides.
- 4- Exchanging delegations on bilateral level among Arab and African parliaments.

- 5- Organizing an Afro-Arab parliamentary symposium in the framework of the forthcoming 12th conference or in the period between the 11th and 12th conferences on:
 - A. The Challenges of Globalization to National Cultures and Economies in Africa and the Arab World.
 - B. Democracy and reality: future outlook.
 - C. Good governance and its experiences.

- 6- Inviting the African and Arab governments to expand diplomatic exchange between the Arab and African countries, and exchange embassies.

- 7- Improving the process of cooperation and coordination among Arab and African parliamentary delegations during the conferences of the IPU through:
 - A- Organizing a meeting between presidents of the two unions or who represent them during each conference for the International Parliamentary Union.
 - B- Instructing the follow up committee and the two unions' secretariats to consider the agenda of every IPU conference and put suggestions regarding the issues which necessitate cooperation and coordination among the representatives of the two groups in the conference.
 - C- Paying attention to cooperation and coordination on issues of mutual interest among the representatives of the two groups in the IPU's Executive Committee, and in the meeting of the women parliamentarian.
 - D- The participation of the two Union's General Secretaries in the coordinating meetings held by the delegations of each group before convening the IPU Conference.
 - E- Exchanging memorandums, presentations and suggestions presented by each union on issues under discussion in the bodies of the Inter-Parliamentary bodies.
 - F- The necessity of commitment in the conferences of the IPU according to what is agreed on in the coordinating meetings, especially during the voting processes.
 - G- The need to represent the follow up committee in all Afro-Arab parliamentary meetings.
 - H- Extending the Afro-Arab parliamentary cooperation to include the regional parliamentary groups from both sides.

V – On Terrorism

The conference condemns terrorism in all its forms, strongly rejects linking terrorism to Islam and calls for distinguishing between terrorism and the struggle of people to liberate their occupied territories and restore their legitimate rights. It also calls the countries to closely cooperate drying the sources of terrorism, confronting it and not giving shelter to terrorists or financing them. The conference calls for convening an Afro-Arab conference under the auspices of the Arab League and African Union to define terrorism and agree on certain mechanisms for combating it.

VI - On the Palestinian Demand

The conference calls upon all Arab and African parliaments participating in the meeting of the IPU, specifically in the coming meeting in Geneva (October, 2007), to support the demand of Palestine to get the full membership of the IPU.

VII- On The Next Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference

The conference welcomes the generous invitation of the parliament of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to convene the 12th Afro-Arab Parliamentary Conference in the city of Abuja during January 2009.