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THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

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Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly, at the Opening of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to address you today as President of the 66th session of the General Assembly. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to our Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his commitment to this organization and for his strong leadership on the complex and difficult issues faced by the United Nations. Throughout this session, I will be strongly committed to conducting my responsibilities in close cooperation with Mr. Ban, with whom I have a strong and productive relationship. Mr. Ban has taken the initiative to organize a series of very important high-level meetings over the next two weeks, touching on many of the urgent issues of our time, and I extend my best wishes for their success. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to my predecessor, H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th session of the General Assembly, and to his team. Mr. Deiss has successfully moved forward important issues on the Assembly's agenda and I intend to build on the remarkable achievements during his mandate, including his efforts to strengthen the global governance architecture.

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We come together at a critical juncture in the history of nations. People across the globe are questioning their systems of governance- no longer afraid to ask for what they deserve- and are actively seeking change. The environment is reacting to human mistreatment, striking back with seemingly endless natural disasters and ensuing humanitarian crises. The world economy is facing the most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression, threatening to destabilize livelihoods and undermining our global efforts for growth and prosperity. Oppressed peoples, as well as those living under foreign occupation, are yearning to be free. And an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world is forcing us to rethink the way we do business at the UN.

Future generations will hold us accountable for how we respond to these critical issues. The 66th session of the General Assembly is, therefore, our opportunity to define our place in this decisive moment in history. This is our opportunity to prove that we, the international community, have the courage, wisdom and tenacity to seek creative and visionary solutions. That we can work together to produce results. That we have learned the lessons of the past. And that, when faced with those few who choose force and brutality, we choose peace, human rights and democracy.

As the President of the 66th session of the General Assembly, I am deeply committed to working with each of you, to build bridges for a united global partnership. Strong collaboration and consensus-

building will be essential for successfully moving forward the Assembly's agenda this session. Our success will also require enhancing South-South and triangular cooperation, as well as dialogue among civilizations and engagement with all major stakeholders, to help ensure inclusive and sustainable solutions that are in accordance with international law. My efforts will be supported by a highly competent team led by talented Qatari diplomats, whom I have selected with care and attention and which reflects the very diversity in this Hall.

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The agenda for the 66th session is significant. Moving forward the myriad of issues before us will require hard work, integrity, and partnership. I have identified 4 main areas of focus that I believe will help frame our work in this session.

The first area is the peaceful settlement of disputes. History has shown that peaceful settlements, including those brokered through mediation efforts, provide the most cost-effective and long-lasting solution for disputes. And in today's world, the need to find peaceful resolution to disputes has become more relevant and urgent than ever. For this reason, I have suggested the theme "The role of mediation in the settlement of disputes" for the General Debate this year. Of course, this theme has a broad and multi-faceted nature. I expect Member States to touch upon different aspects of this matter through their own experience and perspective. In the last few years, we have witnessed a momentum within the United Nations and in many regions regarding the efforts of mediation and other tools of peaceful means. It is my intention to actively pursue this issue in the 66th session with a view not to only sustaining the work that has come before, but also to increasing this momentum. It is my view that the General Assembly should, through its revitalization, become more engaged and empowered on issues of mediation, so that it can fulfill its role as the world's preeminent peacemaker at this major juncture in international relations.

The second key priority area this year is UN reform and revitalization. Our organization is built on strong foundations. But our institutions were designed in a post-World War Two era; today our world is much more interdependent, complex and fast-paced. Change is essential in the cycle of life, and there is no shame in recognizing that after 6 decades our organization needs reform. To remain relevant and legitimate, the UN must adapt itself to meet current global challenges. This session, let us revitalize the work of this Assembly, so that it retains the necessary political power and remains efficient, effective and representative. Of particular importance is supporting the Assembly to respond, at an early stage, to emerging situations of common concern to the international community. To remain legitimate it is also important that there is strong political will to realise previous resolutions and decisions of the Assembly. Let us build on previous efforts to reform the Security Council and, harnessing the collective will of the Membership, advance them further. Let us foster stronger interaction and genuine balance between the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Security Council and ECOSOC in dealing with issues of peace and security, respecting the respective mandates defined by the Charter. And let us continue to ensure interaction between the General Assembly and civil society, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. By giving the UN the attention it deserves, we will ensure that it maintains its rightful place as the centre of global decision-making and as the world's

preeminent forum for international peace and security. This is your responsibility. This is our responsibility. I call on each of you to help achieve this goal.

The third priority area this session is improving disaster prevention and response. Recently we have experienced an unprecedented surge of natural and man-made disasters. The earth's temperature is rising, tectonic plates are shifting, and lands are drying up. Populations across the world are experiencing increased vulnerability, food insecurity, and health and education crises. To address these critical issues, we must enhance cooperation among various actors. We must invest in preparedness and take forward our efforts to reduce risk and vulnerability to natural hazards. One way of achieving this goal will be to focus more on building the capacities of vulnerable regions to make them more capable and self-reliant, not acting only in the aftermath of disasters. We must provide full moral and financial support to help restore peace and security in Somalia, where the people are facing starvation and humanitarian disaster on an unimaginable scale. I will do my utmost to focus the attention of the General Assembly on this unfolding crisis. And we must recognize that humanitarian issues are development issues, and that our success in protecting against natural hazards will have a direct impact on our ability to fulfill the MDGs. I am committed to working with each of you to strengthen our response efforts and to become more coordinated and holistic in our approach.

The fourth focus area is sustainable development and global prosperity. A key pillar of the Secretary-General's work as well, this year will be vital for pushing forward the sustainable development agenda. The High-level Meeting on Desertification to be held next week will give momentum to the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development -"Rio+20"- and the upcoming tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), to be held in the Republic of Korea. Rio +20 in June is a unique opportunity for the international community to recommit to sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. I am committed to actively participating in the conference preparations, with a view to continuing an open and transparent dialogue on the conference's objectives and themes. I believe that all 193 members want Rio+20 to be forward looking, to build on past experiences and to reaffirm the balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development, with the human being at the center of our efforts. On the issue of climate change, a key priority will be safeguarding the human rights of people whose lives are most adversely affected by the earth's rising temperature. This challenge can only be effectively addressed through a partnership between developing and developed countries premised on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The seventeenth session of the parties to United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP -17) will be hosted this year in Durban, and I would urge world leaders to take strong and urgent action for the protection of the global climate, for present and future generations. I wish Member States successful and fruitful outcomes at these important meetings. We will also mark this year the 10th Anniversary of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, a vital framework for helping to address poverty and underdevelopment throughout Africa. With the target date for the achieving the MDGs on the horizon, and as we face global economic turmoil, improving global governance and finding innovative financing modalities will continue to be on our agenda. As the Secretary-General has said on different occasions, the major groups should come together to solve the global financial crisis- no one can fix this issue alone- and the UN should be the central forum to discuss this issue.

I hope that these four areas will provide a framework through which to focus our efforts this session. There will of course be many more issues we have to address, including moving forward on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and strengthening the peacebuilding architecture. This session, you will have extensive deliberations on sensitive issues related to development, human rights, and global safety and security and will review the scales of assessment for the regular budget. My Office and I will work closely with each subsidiary body to ensure this intergovernmental process takes into account the broad spectrum of views and finds consensual resolution. This session I will also emphasize the need for the full and effective implementation of all UN Declarations and Programmes. It will be an important year for the issue of disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, which remains a prominent and ever-more pressing priority for the UN. With a notably busy 2012 agenda of meetings on disarmament, including a UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty and a review of the UN Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, I assure you that I will conduct consultations with all interested parties and will exert all the necessary effort so that long-awaited, tangible progress in this area is realised.

On every issue before us, I pledge to find consensus, build partnerships and focus on implementation and real impact. After two-decades of experience with the diplomatic corps at the United Nations, I consider you my friends and my family, and I will count on your cooperation and support to move the General Assembly's agenda forward.

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The sands are shifting. We have before us a unique opportunity to shape change and ensure that our next chapter will be safer for the most vulnerable, more prosperous for those in need, and kinder to Planet Earth. I am humbled by the opportunity to serve you as President and look forward to our close and successful partnership, working together for the sake of humanity.

Thank you.