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**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the International Conference on the HOPEFOR Initiative:
Improving the Effectiveness and Coordination of Military and Civil
Defense Assets for Natural Disaster Response**

Delivered by Ambassador Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani, Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of the President of the General Assembly

Your Excellency, Mr. Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiya, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar,
Your Excellency, Mr. Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Rumaihi, Assistant Foreign Minister for follow up Affairs of the State of Qatar
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Nasser Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the United Nations General Assembly, who was unable to participate in this important international conference in Doha owing to pressing commitments at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

I should like to thank the State of Qatar for hosting the first International Conference on the HOPEFOR initiative: improving the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence assets for natural disaster response. My sincere gratitude goes to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, without whose support under Qatari leadership the HOPEFOR initiative would not have been possible. The intensive work of Qatar in this regard is indicative of its active involvement in the work of the United Nations.

I understand that over the past two days, you have engaged in a rich and substantive dialogue. I am convinced that this Conference will pave the way for strengthening the effective use of military and civilian defence resources in humanitarian assistance and natural disaster relief operations.

In recent years, many countries — Haiti, Pakistan, Japan, and Turkey, among others — have been struck by major natural disasters. It is clear that Mother Nature does not discriminate between rich and poor nations. In many of those countries the loss of human life has been staggering and sources of livelihood have been almost totally wiped out. The relationship between disasters and the rise in poverty is perfectly clear and, what is more, scientists are predicting an increase in natural disasters in the years to come.

The financial, social and political cost of such disasters is steadily increasing. Last year alone the world witnessed more than 347 natural disasters, with tragic effects on over 255 million people. More than 100,000 human lives were lost, and the economic cost has been estimated at over 304 billion United States dollars. These natural disasters are a sober reminder to the international community of the importance of prioritizing disaster preparedness and ensuring effective disaster recovery.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our experience and lessons learned over the past decades have demonstrated that the effective use of military and civilian assets for natural disaster response can make a real difference on the ground owing to the possibilities such use offers for saving lives and minimizing the impact of disasters. Indeed, disasters can sometimes exceed the capacities of humanitarian organizations.

Inevitably, this raises questions about the modalities and conditions of the use of military assets. The primary responsibility for responding to a disaster rests, of course, with the affected State. Accordingly, its consent, with respect of its sovereignty, is an essential prerequisite for the delivery of such assistance by outside parties, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and other relevant statutory instruments. The function of civilian and military defence assistance must always be to supplement existing relief mechanisms. Furthermore, military humanitarian operations must also respect established guidelines to ensure impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence from political considerations. Herein lies the importance of the HOPEFOR initiative, which aims to address existing gaps in the use of military and civilian assets, develop improved civilian-military coordination in humanitarian operations, ensure that military and civilian assets in disaster relief operations are appropriate, effective and coordinated, and support the existing United Nations humanitarian emergency response system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To crown the tireless efforts of the State of Qatar, the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Turkey, the General Assembly of the United Nations, at its last session, adopted, by consensus, resolution 65/307, “Improving the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence assets for natural disaster response.” I personally attended to the draft resolution during my term as Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations. In adopting this resolution, the international community recognized, first, that building national and local preparedness and response capacity was critical to a more predictable and effective response, second, that it was important to promote preparedness for disaster response through regional and international partnerships, and third, that while humanitarian assistance was fundamentally civilian in character, there was a need to support military capacity and assets in situations where they could play an important role.

The United Nations system, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, is already making a significant difference in providing humanitarian relief and rescue services. The purpose of the HOPEFOR initiative is to provide support for, not to replace, the important work of humanitarian agencies. It also seeks to supplement the United Nations system in disaster risk reduction and prevention activities. In addition, the work that has been done to date, and which we shall continue

to do together in the future, also emphasizes the need for concrete measures such as the establishment of a global network of civilian and military practitioners and the establishment of the Centre of Excellence in Doha to coordinate the use of military and civil defence assets for natural disaster response.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The HOPEFOR initiative is a clear manifestation of the international community's commitment to an enhanced international response aimed at natural disaster risk reduction. It is one of the four pillars on which I have relied during my term as President of the General Assembly. For that reason, supporting that initiative and building on it is one of my priorities, and I propose to turn it to account in pursuing more effective disaster risk reduction and enhanced international responsiveness. At this point, I should like to reiterate that the experience of recent years has shown that investment in disaster risk prevention can save many lives. The life of a human being is infinitely valuable, and defending it is something that unites us all. Consequently, it is incumbent upon us to adapt our capacities so as to be able to deal with the forces of nature. Progress in this domain depends upon effective partnerships; we must work together to meet this global challenge.

As President of the General Assembly, I am firmly committed to the implementation of resolution 65/307, in coordination between the General Assembly and the relevant United Nations agencies. I stand ready to support the outcomes of this Conference when they are submitted to the General Assembly.

I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful conference. I thank you.