

March 19, 2015

Dr. Nabil al-Arabi
Secretary-General of the League of Arab States

(Kindly, forward a copy to kings and presidents of Arab states)

On the occasion of the coming Arab League summit, the undersigned rights organizations from the Arab world extend their best wishes for a successful meeting, hoping that the 26th Arab summit¹ helps to forge strategies that can meet the momentous challenges facing peoples in the region on the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious fronts.

It has been decided that counterterrorism will be the principal topic of the summit, in light of the spread of violent extremism and terrorism across the Arab region, the ability of extremist movements to swallow up considerable portions of Syria and Iraq and establish a state there, and the blows struck by terrorism that pose grave dangers in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen.

The Arab summit could be a golden opportunity to reconsider the policies that have led the Arab region to this catastrophic juncture, unprecedented in the modern age, offering the chance to devise an effective strategy based on lessons learned. The unilateral focus on security and military solutions to terrorist organizations has proven an abject failure regionally and internationally, especially since September 2001. The birth and rapid expansion of ISIS is the fruit of this failure and this strategy, which ignored the deep political and religious roots of this phenomenon in its contemporary form in the region and its spread to other areas of the globe.

Arab kings and presidents must pause to carefully consider the fact that terrorist organizations have failed to take root in any country in the world with an entrenched legacy of the rule of law, democracy, and equality for ethnic and religious minorities, whereas terrorist groups swept over Iraq and Syria in a matter of days, establishing a far-flung “state” that still stands impervious to attacks from an international coalition of more than 60 states. Indeed, this state has managed to establish a “province” in Egypt and take control of two cities in Libya.

It is no coincidence that ISIS established itself in Iraq and Syria; this is no aberration or the result of a far-fetched international conspiracy but a creation of its beneficiaries. The rulers of these two countries opened a path for ISIS through their practice of the

¹ <http://www.mfaconf.gov.eg/>

cruellest, bloodiest forms of political, ethnic, and religious persecution against their peoples over several decades, from the rule of Saddam Hussein and al-Maliki to the Assads, both father and son, demonstrating a brutality that is no less barbaric than the crimes of ISIS. In fact, it is difficult to say which is more savage and ruthless: wiping out Kurdish civilians with chemical weapons in northern Iraq and bombing Shia civilian populations in southern Iraq and Sunni civilians in Hama in Syria or beheading prisoners, enslaving minority women, and killing male civilian prisoners.

There is an important difference, of course: state rulers did not boast of their crimes before the cameras as ISIS does today. The League of Arab States uttered not a word about the massacres of these rulers, only to wake up to just one of the consequences of decades of systematic repression. At the same time, these presidents—especially Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad—offered strategic services to several major powers from time to time at the expense of Iran, Palestine, and Lebanon, ensuring that these powers would remain silent about their crimes. But the most significant and far-reaching strategic service these two regimes offered turned out to be those they gave to ISIS.

The historic responsibility that rests on the shoulders of Arab kings and presidents and this summit requires them to confront this painful fact and to admit it to their peoples and to themselves. Today there are among the participants of the summit who continue these same policies. They have even convinced themselves, more than their people, that they are the best hope to avoid the fate of Syria and Iraq.

There is a second, no less painful fact that must be admitted: the “extremist” religious rhetoric of ISIS does not differ fundamentally from the rhetoric of state religious institutions in several major Arab states that is disseminated through educational curricula and religious media outlets and their cultural publications, which are sold to the general public at nominal cost, subsidized by taxpayers. The citizens and police and military personnel who fall victim every day to terrorist attacks in several Arab states contributed despite themselves, through the taxes they pay, to the ideological grooming of these terrorist monsters. What sets the religious rhetoric of some Arab governments apart from that of ISIS is not its “moderation,” as claimed by the political discourse of Arab governments, but the fact that this rhetoric criminalizes criticism of state rulers, whoever they may be.

It is ironic that the summit will make a decision about the proposal to establish a unified Arab force to confront terrorism, to be financed jointly from the treasuries of participating states, even as these same treasuries finance an extremist religious discourse by which growing numbers of individuals from inside and outside the Arab region are every day recruited by these same terrorist groups it now proposes to fight. Some of these treasuries also finance every day repressive, authoritarian policies, practices, and legislation, which also push growing numbers of citizens—Islamists and secularists—to the brink of despair, extremism, and violence and create a fertile environment for the recruitment of new fighters with terrorist groups, which will be fought by a force now financed by these same treasuries.

Certainly, the failure of the international community to demonstrate the political will needed to implement numerous UN resolutions on the occupied Palestinian territories has also facilitated the mission of terrorist groups to recruit fighters and sympathizers.

Finally, the undersigned organizations urge you to amend the Arab Counterterrorism Convention to bring it into compliance with international standards. As is, the convention constitutes a grave threat to human rights while also having failed to put an end to terrorist activity in the Arab world.

We hope the resolutions that come out of the Arab summit are up to the challenges facing the peoples in this part of the world. We offer our best wishes for a successful summit.

Signatory organizations:

- 1. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies - Egypt**
- 2. Association Vigilance - Tunisia**
- 3. Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights - Bahrain**
- 4. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance - Egypt**
- 5. Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies - Syria**
- 6. Egyptian Commission for rights and freedoms - Egypt**
- 7. El-Nadeem Centre for the rehabilitation of victims of violence and torture - Egypt**
- 8. Hesham Mobarak Law Center - Egypt**
- 9. Human Rights First - KSA**
- 10. Human Rights Training and Information Center – Yemen**
- 11. Libyan Judges Organization - Libya**
- 12. Libyan Network for Human Rights Defenders - Libya**
- 13. Libyan Organization for Legal Aid - Libya**
- 14. Masryoon Against Religious Discrimination - Egypt**
- 15. Mercy association for the defense of internal displaced persons - Libya**
- 16. Palestinian Human Rights Organization - Palestine**
- 17. Sudan Human Rights Monitor - Sudan**
- 18. The Committee for the Respect of Liberties and Human Rights in Tunis – Tunisia**
- 19. The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement - Egypt**
- 20. The Egyptian Foundation for the Advancement of Childhood Conditions - Egypt**
- 21. The Human Rights Legal Assistance Group - Egypt**
- 22. The Moroccan Human Rights Forum - Morocco**
- 23. The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights - Tunisia**
- 24. Tunisian Association for Democratic Women – Tunisia**
- 25. Tunisian League for Human Rights – Tunisia**
- 26. Yemen Organization for Defending Rights and Democratic Freedoms – Yemen**