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Statement of Mrs. Amat Al Alim Alsoswa

Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations
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*Launch Ceremony of the 2009 Arab Human Development Report
Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*

Beirut, July 21, 2009

Your Excellency, the Honourable Prime Minister of Lebanon
Your Excellencies, Honourable Members of the Cabinet and the Parliament,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,
Distinguished Judges, Advocates and Experts,
Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme and the report team, to express my deepest gratitude to the government and people of the Republic of Lebanon for hosting the launch ceremony of the 2009 Arab Human Development Report. Could there possibly be a more fitting setting than this one to launch this report? Is there a more suitable city than Beirut, this lush literary oasis – the World Book Capital of 2009? A more fitting country than Lebanon, synonymous with freedom, harmony and solidarity? There is not. And this was highlighted last month, when the Lebanese people celebrated peaceful elections, proving again to themselves and the international community that democracy and peace are possible in our region and that Lebanon can play a pioneering role in this regard. I am sure that we are gathered in the right venue today. And I thank you for your hospitality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2009 Arab Human Development Report completes the Arab Human Development Report series of that since 2002 has served as an independent platform for scholars in the Arab region to present their vision on the most critical challenges facing the Arab countries in their quest to deepen human development.

These reports have had a tremendous impact in the Arab countries and all over the world. They have paved avenues for dialogue and debate on development policies. They have stimulated creative research on development and ways to improve the quality of life of the Arab peoples. And they have helped us sharpen our resolve to

continue to make progress together. The report we hold in our hands today is intended to deepen this impact by bringing us together to discuss the most fundamental challenges to progress in the Arab region: the challenges to human security.

The Arab Human Development Report 2009 calls on us to focus on the security of the citizen as an entry point and fundamental condition for the security of the State. The starting point for the Report was the perception that the obstacles in the way of a secure and prosperous future for the Arab peoples have grown more complex and intractable in recent years. As a result, the pursuit of human development in our countries has begun to falter. It was thus necessary to extend the type of scrupulous, objective and self-critical analysis that these reports are known for to the precipitous situation of the region as we approach the end of the first decade of the new millennium.

Indeed, the past four years have been quite unlike any other period in our recent history, presenting new challenges and aggravating old ones while heightening a sense of insecurity. We maintain our steadfast belief that only we Arabs can decide where we want to go and how we might arrive there. The best equipment we can take on this journey is our capacity for honest self-analysis and intellectual enquiry, together with our intimate knowledge of our own culture, history, values and individual country circumstances. This new report is a response to this need. If at times it seems to speak sharply about our shortfalls, it does so in the belief that self-knowledge makes us stronger, not weaker: it is the power that enables us to map our own future with confidence.

Allow me to now to sketch for you the main challenges outlined by the 2009 Arab Human Development Report:

The ongoing global economic crisis has visited new external shocks on the Arab region and the rest of the world alike. The collapse of the international financial system has affected each of the Arab countries—the few that enjoy abundance as well as the majority that do not. It has disrupted the revenues, investments and growth models of the oil producers of our region. And in the other Arab countries, the knock-on effects include dwindling remittances, surging unemployment, and receding public services. Some of these countries had opened their economies to market forces without adequate safeguards, and now find themselves exposed without rules of the road for this unfamiliar terrain. Compared to the 1990s, many more Arabs now see the spectre of want approaching their door. In some Arab countries, more than half the population now lives in poverty, with no means to provide for their families or secure the essentials of human dignity. Fluctuating global food prices have deepened poverty and spread malnutrition while under-funded and over-stretched public health systems leave many without access to basic health care, especially as the population grows.

A world financial system that seems to be based on greed must be reformed to serve the people and meet their basic needs. This is a long-term project for the international community, yet the current crisis provides an opportunity to the Arab countries to reconsider their economic priorities as well.

Possibly more disturbing still are the emerging perils of global climate change. The scientific evidence is accumulating that it could have devastating effects on the Arab countries if we do not act proactively and on time. Our region is among the least responsible for directly creating the greenhouse effect—in 2007 our global share of carbon dioxide emissions was no more than 4.7 per cent. Yet, sadly, while our carbon

footprint is among the smallest in the world, our losses from global warming could be among the largest, simply because of our environmental situation. Arabs do not lack for deserts, but global warming would give us still more. It would also shrink what we are already short of, namely, precious water resources. If global warming is not checked, it would also shrivel agricultural production and cause titanic floods in low-lying areas of the Nile River Delta and the Arab Gulf, turning millions into environmental refugees.

We must all understand this issue as an urgent priority and discuss what can be done at the global, regional and national levels to mitigate the impacts of climate change on human security, which could quite possibly be wide and, in some cases, irreversible.

In the first decade of this millennium, the region is also facing extremely complicated circumstances due to external military interventions as well as internal conflicts in many of our countries. In this period, too, we have also witnessed an intensification of the economic blockade on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and, most recently, a devastating intervention in Gaza. None of us will forget the images of the innocent victims—the women, the children and the elderly. And none of us will be oblivious to the daily violence and chaos in Somalia and other countries. The greatest damage from these events has been inflicted on people in the directly affected countries, but the harm also reaches their neighbors, countries that today are saddled with refugee camps. Our region hosts more refugees and internally displaced persons than any other in the world.

Let us also not forget that the richness of our region is its youth, the young men and women who in some countries account for as much as 60% of the population. Every development enterprise we attempt, every capability we build and every opportunity we create must be for them, our living future. We owe them greater

security, better choices and a more empowering political, social, economic and natural environment. We owe them human security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This, then, is the context of the report we are discussing today. The report ties together all of these challenges and others by looking at human development through the lens of human security. The two concepts are natural companions because they both put people first. While human development calls for broadening the choices and freedom of people, human security reminds us that this noble objective is based on the protection of people's lives, basic rights and human dignity from any breach.

The report undertakes a broad analysis of the factors threatening human security in the Arab region. But all these factors are bound by a common refrain – the call for freedom from fear, and freedom from want. These noble human values rest at the core of the great religions that were cradled in this region. And this lofty appeal forms the basis for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But today let us recognize that freedom from fear and freedom from want are also the very essence of human security, and the pursuit of these freedoms is the beating heart of every page of this report.

Some will ask if human security implies a compromise of state security. The report is unequivocal that it does not. Rather the report proves irrefutably that human security and State security are two sides of the same coin. When human security is guaranteed, not only will human development be strengthened, but the State will stand to benefit as well. Indeed, the state that enables human security is the state that will also be able to benefit from the sustainability of its environmental resources, from esteem in the eyes of the citizens, and from the diverse talents of all parts of

society. The state that provides for human security will also be the state whose economy will stand firmly in the face of international fluctuations, whose markets will deliver on food security, and whose institutions will enable full enjoyment of public health. And, last but not least, the state that enables human security is the state that can more rapidly recover from conflict, and, indeed, is the state that stands a better chance to avert conflict altogether.

This is the vision that drives the report's consideration of seven key dimensions that affect people's lives: environmental security, the state's performance in guaranteeing human security, the personal security of vulnerable groups, economic security, nutrition and food security, health and human security, and the impact of conflict and occupation on human security.

The fundamental message of the report is that the only way to sustainably make progress in any one of these areas is indeed to address them all. The human security framework requires us to take a holistic approach to all aspects of human development. We can no longer focus on just one policy issue or another; we need to give all policy areas due attention at the same time.

Allow me to close now by reminding all of us that even a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step:

- If our modest efforts with this report provide a point of reference, discussion and departure that enhances understanding in the region of the indivisibility of security, development and human rights;
- if our humble work can create a rallying point for a new development path to peaceful and productive co-existence and a brighter future for our youth; and
- if our contribution can help to mobilize the abundant intellectual and human capital and strong political will that the Arab peoples possess,

...then we will have succeeded in making the contribution we sought to make when we embarked upon this process two years ago.

The report is the fruit of dedicated research undertaken for over two years by a great number of Arab writers and thinkers. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all those who contributed to this endeavor. The bulk of the analysis was conducted by a core team of researchers and writers whom I thank warmly for their unremitting commitment and for all their introspection and inquisitiveness. The process also benefitted from the thematic and strategic guidance of an Advisory Board comprising leading Arab scholars and prominent representatives of Arab institutions devoted to development. To them I wish to express my deep appreciation for their wise counsel and their unfaltering attention to the soundness of the report's analysis. The report also took inspiration from the viewpoints of over 100 Arab youth. I highly appreciate their concern for human security and human development, and I have high hopes for their future. I am also thankful to Kemal Derviş, the former Administrator of UNDP, for having encouraged and supported this work during his tenure. And I have the pleasure as well to welcome UNDP's new Administrator, Mrs. Helen Clark, whom I deeply thank for having supported the release of this report.

As we have emphasized, the Arab Human Development Report is first and foremost a platform for dialogue. And in this respect I can say that our launch is more a beginning than an end. Indeed, this year's launch will serve as the starting point for a series of dialogues on the report's themes and messages. We will begin the dialogues today and tomorrow, with what we will call *The Beirut Dialogues*, before travelling westward and eastward for the next year, holding public debates in partnership with leading Arab institutions in order to broaden the discussion and support the Arab peoples' and states' shared process of achieving consensus on the priorities for human security in the Arab countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to reiterate my deepest gratitude and my warmest thanks to the government and people of Lebanon, and to you all, for your attendance, your participation, and, above all, for your constant dedication and partnership in the pursuit of full human development in the Arab countries.

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