Joining Hands to Advance Sino-Arab Strategic Partnership in the New Era

Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping

President of the People's Republic of China

At the Opening Ceremony of the Eighth

Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum

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Your Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait,

Your Excellency Adel Al-Jubeir, Rotating Chair of the League of Arab States and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia,

Your Excellency Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States,

Heads of delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends,

Good morning to you all.

Four years ago in this very hall, I invited the Arab world to join the Belt and Road Initiative. Today, we are brought here once again by our shared vision for strong Sino-Arab cooperation. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, as well as in my own name, I wish to extend a sincere welcome to all distinguished guests and warm congratulations on

the opening of the eighth Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF).

Sino-Arab friendship is both old and young. Chinese and Arab peoples, though far apart in distance, are as close as a family. Our ancestors, businessmen and diplomatic envoys alike, traveled to and fro along the overland and maritime Silk Roads. In the modern era, we fought side by side for independence and liberation. We also gave each other strong support in development, creating a splendid chapter of win-win cooperation. Past and present experiences have proven that, whatever changes may take place in the world and whatever obstacles may confront us, China and Arab states have always been good partners sharing mutual benefit and good brothers going through thick and thin together.

To facilitate the common prosperity and progress of interested countries, China has put forward the Belt and Road Initiative. With a commitment to achieving shared benefits through extensive consultation and joint contribution, this initiative focuses on promoting policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity. It has attracted wide support and active participation from the Arab world and the broader international community. Arab states, as important participants and co-creators of the ancient Silk Road civilization located at the juncture of the land and maritime Silk Roads, are natural partners

in Belt and Road cooperation.

Belt and Road cooperation features prominently in the Arab Policy Paper issued by the Chinese government. The Arab League Council at the level of foreign ministers has adopted a resolution expressing the collective political will of Arab states to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative. Later during this ministerial conference, a Declaration of Action on Sino-Arab Belt and Road Cooperation is expected to be signed.

Over the past four years, China and Arab states have worked together to align the Belt and Road Initiative with regional realities, combine collective action with bilateral cooperation, and promote development while upholding peace. Leveraging our respective strengths and pursuing win-win results, we have delivered benefits to people both in our region and beyond. As various projects attest, a dynamic situation has been created and many fruits harvested in our Belt and Road cooperation.

Over the past four years, Belt and Road cooperation has energized every dimension of Sino-Arab relations and propelled Sino-Arab all-round cooperation into a new phase. In this context, I am pleased to announce that, after friendly consultation between the two sides, we have agreed to establish a Sino-Arab future-oriented strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation and common development. This marks a new historical starting point of Sino-Arab friendship and cooperation.

As we advance the Belt and Road Initiative, China stands ready to work with the Arab side to coordinate our development strategies and actions. We must strive to uphold peace and stability in the Middle East, safeguard fairness and justice, promote common development, and learn from each other as friends do. This joint commitment will help us build a community with a shared future for China and Arab states — and for all mankind.

First, China and Arab states need to strengthen strategic trust. A Chinese adage has it that "a just world should be pursued for the common good". The Middle East faces the urgent task of removing the barriers to peace and breaking the development conundrum. People in the region yearn for peace and development. Having formulated its Middle East policy in line with such yearnings, China is an advocate of the legitimate concerns of Arab states in the international arena and stands ready to play a bigger role for peace and stability in the region.

We must stay committed to dialogue and consultation. The many intractable issues in the Middle East must be addressed by all stakeholders together. They should not and cannot be decided by one party alone. We need to uphold the principle of sovereignty and oppose division and fragmentation. We need to champion inclusive reconciliation and stand against forced compromises. We need to fight terrorism and take well-coordinated actions to improve people's lives.

China is ready for more dialogue and consultation with Arab states on a wide range of topics such as development for peace, collective security, humanitarian assistance, shipping corridors, and nuclear-weapon-free zone. I hereby announce that China is setting up a special program for economic reconstruction through industrial revitalization. Under this program, a credit line of 20 billion US dollars will be extended, in accordance with commercial principles, to projects that will produce good employment opportunities and positive social impact in Arab states that have reconstruction needs. China will provide an additional 600 million yuan of assistance to the peoples of Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon to meet their humanitarian and reconstruction needs. China will also discuss with regional countries the implementation of programs totaling one billion yuan to help interested countries build capacity for maintaining stability.

Second, China and Arab states need to help each other realize dreams of rejuvenation. The Arab world is strategically located and blessed with abundant energy resources. With our strong complementarity and converging interests, China and Arab states must synergize our development strategies in pursuit of our respective dreams of rejuvenation.

In this effort, we must stay focused on connectivity. China welcomes opportunities to participate in the development of ports and the

construction of railway networks in Arab states, and support Arab efforts in building a logistics network connecting Central Asia with East Africa, and the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean. We need to work together to build a maritime cooperation center to boost the ocean industry, enhance our ability to provide ocean-related public services, and create a "blue economy corridor". The two sides may jointly build a Belt and Road space information corridor, strengthen aerospace cooperation, and enable Arab states to access China's BeiDou Navigation System and meteorological satellite remote-sensing technology for the good of their national development.

Our energy cooperation needs to be driven by both oil and gas and low-carbon energy. The two sides will continue our "oil and gas-plus" model to intensify our energy cooperation across the entire industrial chain comprising oil and gas exploration, extraction, refinery, storage and transportation. In the meantime, conscious of the surging global energy revolution and the boom of green and low-carbon industries, we need to work more closely together on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as well as solar, wind and hydro power. Efforts along these lines will create a structure of energy cooperation led by oil and gas, supported by nuclear energy and strengthened by clean energy. On this basis, we can build a strategic relationship in energy cooperation that delivers mutual benefit and fosters long-term friendship.

Financial cooperation must go in tandem with collaboration on new and high technology. We may examine ways to make new and high technology the driver and financial services the anchor of our cooperation. It is important to provide short- and long-term support for our Belt and Road cooperation. To this end, we must explore a model of financial and technological cooperation that suits the needs and conditions of the Middle East.

China supports establishing a financial platform for manufacturing cooperation to diversify sources of funding for the construction of industrial parks and to see that financial support goes together with the provision of services and growth of enterprises in these parks. The Chinese government supports Chinese financial and securities institutions in partnering with Arab states' sovereign wealth funds and regulatory bodies to build an international trading platform that is based in the Gulf region, serves the Middle East and North Africa, and attracts investors from around the globe. This platform can be an enabler of Belt and Road cooperation by facilitating the free flow of production factors, efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets. To stimulate more exchanges and cooperation between financial institutions, China will set up a China-Arab states inter-bank association and equip it with a credit line of three billion US dollars for financial cooperation between our two sides.

In light of the medium- to long-term development plans followed by Arab countries, China will pursue closer cooperation with Arab countries in digital economy, artificial intelligence, new materials, biopharma and smart cities. We need to act on our science and technology partnership program and build joint laboratories in key areas of mutual interest. We also need to accelerate our work on a cyber Silk Road, and strive for more cooperation consensus and outcomes in Internet infrastructure, big data, cloud computing and e-commerce.

Third, China and Arab states need to achieve win-win outcomes. With a commitment to deepening reforms in all respects, to continuing its fundamental policy of opening-up, and to pursuing development with its door wide open, China is expected to import over eight trillion US dollars worth of goods and make over 750 billion US dollars of outbound investment in the next five years. This will bring more opportunities and real benefits to Arab countries. We need to fully leverage the special and concessional loans in support of industrialization in the Middle East, and encourage more Chinese business involvement in the development and operation of industrial parks in Arab countries to boost industrial clusters there. China looks forward to the participation of Arab countries in the first China International Import Expo in Shanghai this November, and in the course of the next five years, China will invite all Arab countries to exhibitions and trade and investment fairs held in China. China will work

for solid progress in its FTA negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council and with Palestine, and stands ready to explore with more Arab countries the possibility of concluding full-fledged FTAs.

Fourth, China and Arab states need to promote inclusiveness and mutual learning. A civilization stays vibrant through constant interactions with other civilizations. The Chinese and the Arab civilizations, sharing a long history of mutually-reinforcing exchanges, have all the more reason to draw wisdom and strength from each other in this day and age. I am glad to note that the China-Arab Research Center on Reform and Development that I proposed is operating well as an intellectual platform for experience-sharing on reform, opening-up and governance. I wish the Center still greater success in providing more intellectual support to both sides.

We must spread the message of peace, harmony and truth. One way to do that is to make a continuing success of the China-Arab Inter-civilization Dialogue and Roundtable on Eradicating Extremism. Efforts should be made to clear up misunderstanding through dialogue, solve disagreement through tolerance, and foster a wholesome environment in which genuine faith and good deeds prevail. We need to delve deeper into different religions for inspiration of greater harmony and positivity, and interpret religious teachings in light of the progressing times. It is important that we work together to cultivate a

healthy cyberculture to oppose the spread of extremist contents and hate speech through the Internet.

To enhance mutual understanding between the Chinese and Arab people, China will do the following for Arab countries in the coming three years: invite 100 young leaders in innovation, 200 young scientists and 300 science professionals to workshops in China; invite 100 religious leaders and 600 party leaders to China; provide 10,000 training opportunities; and send 500 medical staff to Arab countries.

In this connection, I am glad to announce the official launch of a China-Arab press center, a China-Arab e-library portal and the Fourth Arab Art Festival co-hosted by the two sides in China.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends,

As two important players in the international political arena, China and Arab states must advance our cooperation in step with the progress of the world and human history. Peace, reform and development are the shared pursuit of countries in the Middle East, and a stable, peaceful and happy life is what their people yearn for. It is imperative for all parties to grasp the trend of history, respond to the calls of the people, and make concerted efforts to find a new path toward full rejuvenation of the Middle East.

The diversity of the Middle East should be hailed as a source of

strength for the region. It is important to respect the different national circumstances of regional countries and their independent choices, and uphold the principles of treating each other as equals and seeking common ground while setting aside differences. Non-regional countries, for their part, must do more to facilitate dialogue for peace and contribute to the peace and development of the region. We must reject the idea of absolute security at the cost of others and the zero-sum or self-supremacist mentality. Instead, we must together pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security.

Development holds the key to many governance-related issues in the Middle East. Development potentials can be unlocked through reform, and more progress achieved through opening-up. As long as cooperation stays a priority for all regional countries, you can pool development efforts for greater win-win results. This is a sure way to tap into your complementarity and deliver prosperity to all.

The Arabs are an ancient nation defined by great resilience and wisdom. Being intrepid in face of challenges and always keen to stay ahead of the curve, you have created a splendid civilization. When Arab countries get united, no difficulty or risk can hold you back.

The Palestine issue is one of fundamental importance for peace in the Middle East. The Chinese people, out of justice and empathy, would like to call on all relevant parties to abide by international consensus and

handle issues related to Palestine in an impartial way, rather than sow the seeds of conflict in the region. China supports efforts to convene a new international conference on Palestine and to explore new peace mechanisms for the Middle East. It is imperative to build on the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, and bring the Palestine-Israel peace talks out of the impasse as soon as possible.

We must give more concrete support to the people of Palestine. In this connection, I would like to announce a grant of 100 million yuan to Palestine in support of its efforts to grow the economy and improve the lives of its people. In addition, China will provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestine, and make further contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends,

As an important platform for equal-footed dialogue and results-oriented cooperation, the CASCF has a great role to play in bringing China and Arab states even closer. To do justice to an ever-growing Sino-Arab relationship in a new era, we must break new ground in the institution building of the Forum. To be specific, we must improve allocation of resources by making the most of existing mechanisms while exploring new ones, enhancing the role of cooperation mechanisms on energy, media, the BeiDou Navigation

Satellite System and the Business Conference, and exploring new cooperation mechanisms on women, youth and tourism. The Forum must work in a way that responds to the actual needs of our two sides and facilitates closer communication. Only with a better meeting of minds can we make a greater difference through our collective actions.

As an Arab proverb goes, actions are fruits while words are but leaves. The Chinese have an ancient saying to the same effect that with perseverance, one can carve on stone and metal. Let us act in the Silk Road spirit, remain steadfast in our determination, and work tirelessly toward our goals of rejuvenating two great nations and building a China-Arab community with converging interests and a shared future.

In conclusion, I wish the conference a full success.

Shukran! Thank you.