

**Speech by
The Minister of Information of Bahrain,
Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar**

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Honorable guests,

I am pleased to welcome you all, guests and participants, at the opening session of this media conference which is organized by the Ministry of Information in the Kingdom of Bahrain in coordination with NATO's Public Policy Division.

The choice of the conference's theme, "The Media in a Changing World: Gulf and NATO Visions", clearly expresses at this time – which is pregnant with the manifestations of tension, the portents of a clash, and the potential for accord – the extent of the need to discuss issues of importance to both the Gulf states and the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in order to achieve a clearer understanding of those complex issues.

The 17th NATO summit, known as the 2004 Istanbul summit – the seventh summit after the end of the Cold War – is a new turning point that represents the strategy of building bridges, partnership, and cooperation with other regions of the world, including the Arabian Gulf, in order to confront the challenges the world faces today and so as to bolster security and stability through NATO's participation in finding

practical solutions to regional issues in light of regional and international changes that have produced unprecedented threats to security, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organized crime, drugs, money laundering, and other threats. Those threats are no longer confined to an individual state or a particular organization. They are global threats, now that regional and international security issues have become interlinked and cannot be dealt with on a piecemeal basis.

On this premise, and out of a desire to consolidate the pillars of security and stability, the Kingdom of Bahrain and most of the Gulf Cooperation Council states have interacted positively with this novel strategic tendency within the NATO framework.

We are all aware today that enormous changes occurred in international relations and in the balance of power after the end of the Cold War, the events of 11 September, and after the invasion of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. All those changes have had an effect on NATO's nature, structure, responsibilities, and tasks within and outside its traditional framework. NATO's concepts, instruments, and policies have changed and the era of confrontation has turned into an era of cooperation, partnership, and joint responsibilities in managing crises and resolving conflicts, and in building the pillars of peace in a post-armed conflicts era. Thus NATO is a partner in the Mediterranean dialogue. Today it is engaged in a dialogue

with the Gulf Arab states within the framework of the Istanbul Initiative with the aim of activating a reciprocal dialogue in order to bring about greater understanding and then tackle the security threats, foremost among which is terrorism.

I believe that in the light of those tremendous changes and accelerating events on the regional and international arenas, a pressing need has arisen for the media on both sides to correct the misconceptions and distorted stereotypes and to explain complex security issues so as to achieve a mutual understanding of the needs of security, stability, and sustained development of our states and societies through an enlightened, fair, and objective media on both sides.

Within the framework of the strategy of cooperation within the Istanbul Initiative which is based on partnership, flexibility and integration – there will be partnership in the sense that each side will seek to listen to the ideas of the other, without any side imposing any stands or views on the other. Flexibility comes through constructive cooperation within the framework of what is known today as “soft security”, that is through media networks and mechanisms, by agreeing on certain measures gradually and moving the two sides toward more advanced cooperation in order to choose one of the forms of institutional relations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Conflict in the twenty first century is no longer only a conflict of weapons and advanced technology, for it is also

a conflict between ideas, with human beings aspiring to find new ways for that intellectual conflict. In a changing world, today's media push ideas and their influence forcefully to the forefront, including such ideas that advocate concord, peace, and justice, and those that advocate violence, hatred, extremism, and taking arbitrary measures against the rights of others.

From such a premise the media draws its strength in evolving public opinion and in demonstrating the extent of its influence over foreign policies, and its benefiting from acculturation.

It has become clear that one of the first challenges which our societies and states are facing is such a war -- the war of ideas which intensify the dangers and the effects of the other challenges that include security challenges, the challenges of development, the challenges of modernization and reform, and the challenges resulting from the effects of globalization.

If we consider the axes of our meeting today we will immediately find there is a common factor among the four axes dealing with the role of the media. Those four axes are: The modern Arab and Gulf media have the potential and capability to achieve peace or to prevent – if they can – the outbreak of conflicts. The Arab and Gulf media can contribute positively to the elimination of the consequences of armed conflicts. They can bring about peace in societies

threatened with collapse, civil wars, divisions, and splits in their national entity. The Arab and Gulf media can promote accord among their populations.

How then do the modern Arab and Gulf media undertake those responsibilities which have been imposed by the changes in international relations and the balance of power? That is the question to which we are searching with you for convincing answers.

Just as we have always called for “a culture of peace” we today with strength and determination call for “a media of peace”, especially in our Arab region, the Middle East, and the Gulf region in particular.

Those responsibilities can be discharged only through an unbiased, balanced, and independent media that enjoys objective and favorable conditions to receive and access information, and whose policy is to prevent incitement and sensationalism, and to provide platforms for followers of all trends to express their views freely and without fear.

Perhaps the Arab and Gulf media is in great need of such elements, possibly prior to the outbreak of conflicts. If conflicts are imposed on our societies as we are seeing every day in the form of tragedies and deterioration in the conditions of the Arab citizen, be it for instance in Iraq or the occupied Palestinian territories, the media must then shoulder its responsibilities and assume the role of a

“humane media”, a media that sheds light on human rights violations and on championing the victims of aggression. It is a role that could put the lives of media people at risk and endanger their personal safety. However, that is the indicator for waging the war of truth, a war where the media people are on the frontline.

It is a pressing responsibility of the Arab and Gulf media to move from a media of reaction to a media of “prevention” and to a course or a culture of prevention of and warning against all forms of security risks and threats on various political, economic, and social levels so that they become early-warning media. We fully realize that today’s disagreements are tomorrow’s disputes, and tomorrow’s disputes could turn into wars and conflicts in the foreseeable future. Within such a framework, the framework of warning and prevention, the media has what one could call a decisive “preventive role” in monitoring the signs of crises and gleaning warnings of impending conflicts and wars.

The modern Arab and Gulf media has its role -- indeed it has its roles – not only at times of war or peace, but before the outbreak of wars, and in the disturbances whose various phenomena we observe in numerous locations in the Middle East.

Yes, the commitments and professional standards of the modern Arab and Gulf media may be to search for the truth, and to report the news through strict professionalism,

neutrality, impartiality, balance, and accuracy, but the greater commitment and the loftier responsibility in a troubled and changing world that faces challenges every day is to be always guided by a political and moral authority which it draws first from the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principles of international law and especially humanitarian international law, and a professional code of honor that aims to defend human rights and peace and strengthen the building of democracy so that our Arab media will truly be “a media of peace” in support of justice, security, and stability.

I hope that a calm and truthful scientific atmosphere will prevail throughout your discussions and that it will result in the adoption of principles and values that guide the kind of media we are sincerely advocating so that security and stability will prevail and the aspirations of nations and peoples to an ideal life marked by coexistence, security, and stability will be achieved.

Thank you.