

Statement

**Delivered by Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit
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**Before
the Second Joint Conference**

**NATO- Egypt: A dialogue-
The situation in the Middle East**

25th May 2008

Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express my pleasure in welcoming you here in Egypt while inaugurating the works of the second public diplomacy seminar between Egypt and NATO.

The holding of this meeting further reiterates the importance Egypt is attributing in pursuing its dialogue with NATO, as long as it contributes in strengthening international peace and security.

I believe that your discussions during the works of this seminar would start from where it ended in the first seminar held in February 2006. You may also agree with me that the evaluation of the progress achieved until now is indispensable to help foresee horizons of the upcoming stage of the relations between Egypt and NATO, which I expect it would encompass a great deal of positive interaction between both parties.

You may be aware that I expressed in many occasions our views with regard to the nature of the relationship between Egypt and NATO institutions, guided by the principles of the Egyptian foreign policy, and taking into consideration both Arab and Islamic dimensions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international and regional consequences after the fall of Berlin's wall, followed by the events of September 11, had a clear impact in rising new challenges imposing on the international community to unify efforts and avoid useless divisions, while dealing with those challenges. Egypt immediately welcomed the dialogue with NATO with the conviction that dialogue is contributing with no doubts to peace and stability.

After almost three decades have passed on reaching peace with Israel, Egypt continues to pursue its leading role in reaching the détente between both Israeli and Palestinian parties. Such détente is indispensable if intentions were true about establishing two separate states living in peace living next to each other.

Egypt will continue, as it always did, to support the right of the Palestinian people to get their legitimate right in establishing their own independent state. Before having it realized, it is important that we seriously work towards the improvement of the living condition of the Palestinian citizen, and provide him with a safe and decent life.

Having the Palestinian cause in the center of the Middle East problem, we further insist to be successful in reaching peace with a view to solve all pending issues in the region such as Iraq and Sudan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is still room for NATO to explain more thoroughly its new role in the security architecture of the twenty first century through public diplomacy activities which may help in conveying a more accurate insight of the Arab Islamic world and its real values, to the NATO member states in a fair and objective way. I am confident that such approach, if used properly, would contribute in rectifying the distorted picture, which several media intentionally transmit to the people of western states, and can help in bridging the gap of dialogue and communication between both sides on the Mediterranean.

In its persistent public diplomacy efforts, NATO makes it a case in pointing out that it has nothing to do with the colonial legacy of some of its members, one which caused misperceptions and mistrust amongst wide and important influential sectors of the public opinion in these societies.

In this context, it is expected that the Egyptian public would be weary from the implications of joining regional alliances in general and not necessarily of NATO in particular. The case that explains NATO's persistent efforts to improve its image to the Arab and Islamic public opinion.

There are still important questions with no definite answers that the Arab and Islamic public opinion search for persuasive answers to disperse such skepticism. Such questions include NATO's role in wider Middle – East.

Egypt- NATO relation witnesses positive developments which are reflected in various areas such as the Individual Cooperation Programme that was concluded between Egypt and NATO last October, my participation in the

Ministerial Luncheon held in Brussels last December, the visit of a number of Egyptian Parliamentarians to NATO's Headquarters in January 2008, and a visit by NATO Parliamentarians to Egypt earlier this month (12-17/5/2008). Not to mention Egypt's effective participation in NATO's various activities set in the Mediterranean Dialogue Work Programme. In this context, Allow me to refer to NATO's couple of visits in May 2007, as well as hosting the first public diplomacy seminar in Egypt in February 2006.

Furthermore, Egypt favorably welcomes the ongoing constructive dialogue with NATO aiming, through the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group (APAG), at establishing a new mechanism with the Mediterranean Dialogue Nations. Such mechanism should allow the exchange of views and ideas in areas of common interest within a free and informal framework, in an effort to reinforce our common cooperation.

I will not dwell much on the technicalities of cooperation with NATO, but I would like to stress upon the great deal of openness in our relation with NATO, which allows Egypt to welcomingly select new ideas and initiatives according to our needs.

We appreciate NATO's policy in promoting security and stability which tempted some regional actors as the African Union to seek its logistical support, and some regional players – to offer it this logistical support. We also welcome NATO's closer rapprochement with the United Nations which we see as the "mother institution" and the source of international legitimacy.

Finally, I trust that your discussions throughout the day will conclude to useful results to both parties, with a view to upgrade this dialogue to a level which achieves both interests and targets.

Thank you