State of Palestine

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Prime Minister Hamdallah's remarks before the UN Summit to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants
United Nations General Assembly, New York

Excellency Mr. Peter Thompson, President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly,
Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Excellencies Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Ambassadors

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored and humbled to join you today in this important Summit as the representative of the Palestinian people, a people whose majority population is comprised of refugees, constituting nearly a quarter of the world's refugee population, over 40% of the globe's long-term refugees, and the most protracted refugee crisis in contemporary history.

I carry with me the voices of our millions of refugees – over 5.3 million men, women and children registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) – from refugee camps dispersed in our region in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and in Occupied Palestine, including in Occupied East Jerusalem, along with millions more from the Diaspora in the Middle East region, Latin America, Europe, North America and beyond, where many of our refugees migrated in search of more stable and prosperous lives.

I carry their stories of loss and tragedy, displacement and exile, suffering and indignity, since the onset of their plight in the 1948 Al-Nakba, when the majority of our people were forcibly uprooted and expelled from their homes and ancestral lands or fled for survival following this Assembly's partition of Mandate Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel, including on the ruins of their homes and villages. In the long years thereafter they have continued to be unjustly denied their rights, including to return to live at peace with their neighbors and to compensation for their losses, forcing generation after generation to endure great hardships, deprivation and marginalization, repeated displacement and violent crises.

Yet, I also carry with me a message of hope from the Palestine refugees. They, who have endured so many upheavals and misfortunes, remain resilient, adherent to their dreams and legitimate aspirations, and hold firm to a conviction in humanity, in international law, and in the arc of history and justice that will restore their rights and bestow upon them the dignity and peace they have for so long been denied. They have contributed broadly, positively and proudly in their communities in the Diaspora and also to the steadfastness of their people. They share this spirit of hope and resilience with their refugee and migrant sisters and brothers around the world, including and especially in our troubled region, standing in solidarity with them in this moment of need, offering solace and support as they all seek and await just, peaceful solutions for their plights.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Summit today must transcend the statements made in this august chamber. We are duty bound – politically, legally and morally – to remedy the plight of the world's millions of refugees and migrants and provide them with the humanitarian assistance they need to live safe, dignified and productive lives. At the same time, we must exert every possible effort to uphold, respect and restore their rights, in accordance with international law, including human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law as applicable, and to address the root causes of their plights, from wars and armed conflicts, including foreign occupation; to oppression and persecution, discrimination and human rights violations; poverty, unemployment and food insecurity; terrorism; and the natural disasters and climate change, which are plaguing our world and have forced millions of people to leave the security and sanctity of their homes and devastated so many lives.

Based on this abiding obligation, this General Assembly has rightly persisted in its calls and efforts for a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees, including respect for their right to return, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) (11 December 1948), and it has rightly supported the mandate of UNRWA for more than sixty-five years, ensuring the provision of vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees, as well as to Palestinians displaced in June 1967 and subsequent hostilities who are in need.

With the longstanding principled support of the international community, in line with the same principles of responsibility and burden-sharing highlighted today, UNRWA has helped to alleviate the plight of our refugees, and its education, healthcare, relief, social and microfinance assistance programs, along with protection and emergency aid in periods of crisis, exemplify the value of providing both humanitarian and development aid, even as we seek just solutions. It provides a model of how to humanely address today's crises of refugees, displaced persons and migrants by fulfilling basic needs, while also building human capital and self-reliance and insisting that no one is left behind in our collective pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But, for our people, UNRWA has meant more than aid. It has been a lifeline, sustaining our refugees in the darkest of times, as witnessed in recent years when the coping capacities and cohesion of the Palestine refugees have been so undermined, whether due to the catastrophic conflict in Syria, with its massive spillover into Lebanon and Jordan, or in Occupied Palestine, where the brutalities and indignities of the Israeli occupation and inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza and military aggressions upon it have gravely impacted refugee communities. As we grapple with the root causes of the current large movements of people, we must not ignore that, for the

first time in decades, Palestine refugees have been compelled to leave the region, including in perilous journeys across the sea, fleeing the ravages of war and poverty in search of human security and better lives for their families, a universal hope and desire, as we behold in the movements of refugees and migrants in our world today. Indeed, there are always compelling reasons at the root of such movements.

Of course, the presence of the Agency for more than 65 years is also testament to the far-reaching consequences of the failure to secure just and lasting solutions .It underscores the need for a reinforced commitment by the international community to engage proactively in conflict resolution and prevention, in conformity with international law, and to tackle the root causes of forced and protracted displacement. The solutions are not only humanitarian and developmental; conflict resolution must be a top priority and require political will and courage. Otherwise we will face the continued and growing plight of refugees, many languishing in camps for decades, as has been the tragedy of Palestine refugees and other refugees in protracted situations around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this occasion, we renew our appreciation for UNRWA's work and express our deep gratitude to the Agency's Commissioner-Generals and all staff, international and national, for their extraordinary efforts in support of the well-being of our refugees and in assisting to preserve their dignity and hopes across the decades. We must pay tribute here to the 30,000 national staff of UNRWA, Palestine refugees themselves who have been serving their brethren as humanitarians, teachers, doctors, nurses, administrators, counselors, therapists, emergency workers, and more. They are testament to the fact that refugees are not necessarily a burden, but rather can be agents for good in the societies and countries hosting them, pending achievement of just solutions, and also testament to the power of education, a fundamental right and necessity for all refugees and migrants.

Today, we must also recognize the central roles of the Host Countries of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, and express our abiding gratitude for their support to the large Palestine refugee communities they have hosted for nearly seven decades and for their facilitation of UNRWA's mission and ongoing cooperation.

We are grateful as well to all donor countries and organizations from around the world, large and small, for their generous support to UNRWA over the long years, ensuring the continuity and quality of the Agency's programs. We appeal to the donor community for sustained and predictable support that is commensurate with growing refugee needs and remedies critical funding gaps to allow the Agency to fulfill its humanitarian mission.

We stress the importance of such principled international support, in line with abiding political responsibilities and humanitarian obligations, and appeal for continued solidarity with the Palestine refugees and the Palestinian people as a whole, pending the achievement of a just, comprehensive, peaceful and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all aspects, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principle sand the Arab Peace Initiative. We firmly believe that achieving the rights and freedom of our

people is a political, security, humanitarian and moral imperative for our region and our world that must be urgently pursued.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The State of Palestine pledges to uphold the commitments made today in the Political Declaration, as well the commitments set forth in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. We highlight in this regard the commitments towards promoting durable solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations, with a focus on return in safety and dignity. The Palestine refugees must not be the exception to this commitment and this right.

We also pledge our support for the document Towards a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Palestine is proud to have been among the initial States to join the Group of Friends of Migration and reaffirms its solidarity here today.

We will continue to cooperate with all international partners in the search for just, peaceful and sustainable solutions for the injustices and challenges we all face, including a solution for the plight of our Palestine refugees, which remains among the highest priorities for the Palestinian leadership. In closing, we reaffirm our empathy and solidarity with refugees and migrants around the world and our hopes for fulfillment of their rights for better, safer, more dignified futures for themselves, their children, their countries, and our global family.