

## Opening Remarks on the Occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future Meeting of Civil Society Representatives, Doha

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Excellencies, distinguished guests, friends and colleagues, As-salaam alaikum

It gives me great pleasure to be here today at the official opening of this important meeting of civil society representatives. Canada's International Development Research Centre is pleased to have been chosen as Canada's civil society partner in the Forum for the Future 2010, and we are pleased to be working with our Qatari partners, the National Human Rights Commission of Qatar and the Arab Democracy Foundation on this important initiative. I would like to thank them and the State of Qatar for hosting us here today.

The themes before us today, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the role of youth, and the questions of the private sector and corporate social responsibility, are important ones in the Broader Middle East and North Africa and, indeed, in other regions of the world as well.

Canada's International Development Research Centre is, as the name suggests, a research centre. IDRC does not set policies or implement develop programs or projects. Rather, IDRC supports researchers from the developing regions of the world to conduct research on pressing problems that affect their societies, in an effort to find sustainable, practical solutions to a variety of social, economic and environmental problems. For many years now, IDRC has been supporting scholars from the developing world to do research on the themes that today's meeting addresses. IDRC has supported path-breaking work on conflict resolution mechanisms; the causes of conflict; security sector reform; private sector development; entrepreneurship; conflict diamonds; and youth and democratisation, to mention just a few related topics.

As a research centre, IDRC does not take a stand for or against a particular cause or political position. IDRC does believe most deeply, however, that the three themes of this conference are, like many other parts of public policy, areas where evidence and reason can be brought to bear, where humans can learn from their mistakes and from the mistakes of others, and where good practices based on evidence and experience can be brought to bear. Doing quality research on these three themes involves drawing on many disciplines, on history, political science, constitutional law, economics, demography, sociology, and, increasingly, the use of modern techniques such as opinion polling, geographic information systems and environmental science. The Broader Middle East and North Africa region has a long history in all these fields of knowledge, in several cases stretching back many centuries. I am pleased to see that several of IDRC's research

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partners are here today, ready and willing to share their experiences and their knowledge, the fruits of their research.

While Canada's International Development Research Centre does not take stands for or against any particular cause or political position, it does stand unambiguously for openness, transparency and pluralism, for these values represent the essential bases for research, for science, for progress. At the Ottawa consultation of civil society representatives in the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future process last November, all participants renewed their commitment to strengthening the basis for democracy, consultation and cooperation in the region, and broadening the scope of participation in politics, public affairs, and decision-making. Participants further acknowledged the role of freedom of expression, judicial independence, equality and accountability before the law, observing integrity in applying the law in achieving political, social and economic development.

The recommendations developed in the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future process so far are the result of a collaborative process among civil society partners from across the Broader Middle East and North Africa region. This year's Forum for the Future process included three regional preparatory workshops, and six national seminars— all of them successfully completed, despite considerable difficulties in some cases. As a result of a productive dialogue—both during and after these workshops and seminars—civil society partners have distilled the main outcomes of these events into five clearly stated, feasible, practical, action-based recommendations that we hope will encourage collaboration between governments and civil society to address key challenges and opportunities in the BMENA region. These recommendations have been presented to senior officials from the governments of the G8 and the BMENA region, and other interested parties, in Ottawa last November. These recommendations were received positively by the government representatives assembled there.

I look forward to hearing your views on these recommendations, and on the broader issues they evoke. Let us all have a fruitful discussion. Thank you.