H.E. Abdullah Lahlouh, Deputy Palestinian Minister of Agriculture

[Translation] Good morning. Ladies and gentlemen, dear participants, please allow me to express my thanks and appreciation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and his Excellency Dr. Hazim El-Nasser, Minister of Water and Irrigation, for his patronage for this conference, his hospitality, and good reception. I would also like to extend greetings to the Palestinian government, hoping that the conference will be successful.

We participate in this conference because the area has an important historical, economic, political, and religious significance for all people in this region. We aspire to ensure a decent life for our local people and to stop atrocities to the environment and its degradation. In Palestine, we hope that this vital region will be able to cope with its demographic growth, especially taking into account the developmental requirements for the 21st century. We aim to improve agriculture, industry, tourism, water, and the environment in this region to be able to access regional and international markets. The region is also a destination for tourists because of its religious and historical significance and its significance for civilization.

The Palestinian side of the Jordan Valley has always suffered from negligence and pollution for decades. We suffer from military occupation, which lead to usurpation of water resources, which made any rehabilitation efforts almost impossible. We are looking forward to the NGO Master Plan for the recognition of the legitimacy and fair rights of the Palestinian people. We are seeking sustainable use of resources by the people living there. We have reviewed this Master Plan. The Palestinian plans and studies confirm that we need the establishment of a Palestinian State within the borders of 1967 and control over our own natural resources. We are one of the countries on the banks of the Jordan River, so we all have shared responsibilities. There should be no Jewish settlements on our land. It calls for cooperation of all people and the rehabilitation of the lower part of the Jordan River for the benefit of all of us.

There are 120 proposed development projects. The plan is comprehensive in its scope. The environment and water represent basic elements for any plan for the Lower Jordan River. We recognize water scarcity in the region, but we can’t move forward without rehabilitating the Jordan River. While we recognize the types of challenges that the implementation of such an ambitious project may face, there are interventions that can be implemented immediately. Taking into account assumptions of the plan, it will help build confidence and joint cooperation of the parties in addition to improve the life of local people and improve infrastructure for local towns in the Jordan Valley. This is a basic right of these people. Local governments and international organization should continue to work for this and we call for further attention to be paid to this by local governments. The plan should be aligned with these policies and strategies and we hope that it will be implemented.

We strongly believe that the plan is based on a two-state-solution. The control of our crossings and social division are major challenges. There can be no development along with an occupation and control of our natural resources. Hopefully the process will start. We will consider and evaluate the outcomes of this plan and conference in line with our national priorities and plans. A sustainable environment is an important incentive for lasting peace. However, there can be no sustainable development under the occupation.