

**Speech of the Chairman of the Gulf Research Center Dr. Abdulaziz Sager
at the Opening Session of the Gulf Forum 2011 titled ‘The Gulf and the Globe’**

In the Name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful

Your Royal Highnesses the Princes,

Your Excellencies the Ministers,

Honorable Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Al Salam alaikmu wa rahmatu Allah wa barakatu

I am pleased to welcome you to the opening session of the proceedings of ‘The Gulf and the Globe’ forum. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the patron of this forum. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the officials in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, in particular the General Director of the Institute Dr. Abdulkarim Al-Dekhayel, for having supported and sponsored the organization of this forum. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the speakers and participants who have travelled to Riyadh and prepared research papers that are going to enrich the sessions of this forum and reinforce the value of its vision, findings and recommendations.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Riyadh hosts ‘The Gulf and the Globe’ forum even as it prepares to host within days the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit and to chair the Supreme Council of the GCC countries in its next session. All this comes as the Arab World undergoes unprecedented circumstances, which will undoubtedly bear on the Gulf countries. The GCC is about to complete three decades of existence and is preparing to begin a fourth decade amid great aspirations and major challenges. The challenges are enormous; but they are not inhibiting. Rather, they provide a motivational force to the GCC system. Many observers predicted that this system would not last beyond the early foundation phase. However, the GCC is now set to meet challenges with increased steadfastness and success. It would suffice here to refer to the role of the GCC in dealing with the outside world as a united economic and political bloc, whose impact on the

global economy and the global balance of power cannot be underestimated. This is evidenced by the fact that trade exchange with the countries of the world is now in the region of \$1 trillion compared to \$261 billion in 2000. The GCC countries have acquired the trust of foreign investors and attracted foreign direct investments of nearly \$300 billion in value compared to \$30 billion in 2000, i.e. an increase in excess of 827 percent and an annual growth rate of over 28 percent. Moreover, the GCC countries constitute one of the most important sources of energy in the world with a combined production in the region of 16 million barrels per day. Also a GCC member state, Saudi Arabia, is one of the G-20.

Granted the importance of the achievements realized by the GCC, the significant fact to be always borne in mind is the unique ability of the GCC to maintain its continuity and presence irrespective of the turbulent times and transformations that have been witnessed in the region. The foundation of the GCC almost coincided with the first Gulf War, which broke out between Iraq and Iran and continued for nearly a decade. It was followed by the second Gulf War, which was triggered by the invasion and occupation of the State of Kuwait by the troops of Saddam Hussein's regime in 1990. This was followed by the war of liberating this GCC member state. The 9/11 attacks followed with their attendant wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively. The US-British invasion of Iraq in 2003 culminated in overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime after the American and western troops entered Iraq. Since late 2010, the region has been witnessing what is called the 'Arab Spring.' In this 'Arab Spring' some regimes have been overthrown whereas others are stumbling. The repercussions of this phase continue.

All these wars and transformations notwithstanding, the GCC is still steadfast and has maintained its existence. This testifies to the political will of the member states as regards maintaining and supporting this body, on the one hand, and the ability of the Council to adapt to meet challenges, on the other. It also attests to its success in undertaking cumulative efforts to strengthen aspects of cooperation and integration between member states.

The current challenges faced by the region overshadow the present and future of the region. Therefore, they have to be dealt with seriously to ward off the designs of those who lurk in the dark seeking to bring about the disintegration of the region in order to usurp its wealth. These challenges comprise:

1. The recurring attempts of Iran to intervene in the domestic affairs of the member states and employ sectarianism to divide the sons of the same homeland and the followers of the same religion who have chosen coexistence for more than 1,400 years.
2. Iran's threat to use military power against the Gulf countries, or threatening to lure these countries into becoming a direct party in the conflict if a military confrontation breaks out between the west and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program.
3. The challenge of filling the security vacuum in the absence or weakness of the present American role. Current projections indicate that this role will decline, or the trust between the GCC countries and the US will gradually diminish owing to contradictory

American attitudes, which frequently conceal real motives. This may also happen owing to the failure of the US to solve decisive and sensitive causes in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan in addition to its ambiguous relations with Iran.

4. Meeting the repercussions of the global financial crisis even though it has not palpably affected the Gulf countries. However, the Gulf countries must work on warding off the effects of this crisis by adopting stronger and more resilient economic and social policies.
5. The deteriorating situation in the geographical neighborhood, especially in Syria and Yemen. This poses a threat to the Arabian Gulf countries. Therefore, it is imperative to lay down a plan to deal with, or forge a unified vision towards, the outcome of the events in these two countries. This will contribute to stemming the repercussions on the GCC countries and reinforce their role in providing aid and assisting in restoring security and stability and rebuilding the two countries.
6. The events of the so-called 'Arab Spring' have proven that there is a wave of revolutionary political transformations sweeping the Arab World and the Gulf countries, albeit most of the latter countries are safe from the consequences of these events. However, they affirmed that Gulf nationals are not asking for change as is the case in other Arab countries. Rather, they are seeking reformation; this has been adopted by the Gulf countries; however, these countries are now called upon more than ever before to take new and serious steps towards total reformation.
7. In addition to the above, the Gulf countries face the challenges of accelerating the shift to a knowledge society and modernizing education curricula, eradicating poverty and unemployment, indigenizing technology (technology transfer), substituting qualified and trained labor force for migrants, and shifting from a consumer society to a productive society by nationalizing major and strategic industries.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The GCC countries are now called upon more than ever before to secure their home front and strengthen the unity of their people via conferring primacy on citizenship, reinforcing the values of national dialogue between the different classes of society, continuing the efforts of gradual political reform, empowering women, and tackling the problems of unemployment and poverty. Moreover, the Gulf countries should endeavor to achieve increased coordination and cooperation between the GCC member states, especially in the fields of security, defense and foreign policy. These measures represent a safe passage to establishing national cohesion in the Gulf societies, preserving their national gains and achievements that have been realized through the past decades and aborting any attempts by regional or international powers to intervene in their domestic affairs to undermine their national unity, compromise their security, or rob their wealth.

Moreover, the Gulf countries require a clear international partnership based on parity and clarity and distanced from bargaining or secret deals. These are prerequisites to secure this region, which possesses great reserves of energy and witnesses a regional competition, which is on the verge of annihilating everything if it blows up. In this regard, the American role should be spelt

out more clearly and the European Union countries, NATO members and the large economic powers, such as China and India, should have a greater presence, and the role of the GCC countries should be more potent.

This forum, in which a distinguished elite group of scholars and experts is participating, is an important scientific event to discuss the challenges facing the GCC countries in the present time and analyze the patterns of existing and potential relations between the Gulf countries and the world. It is also an occasion to forge visions and perceptions that contribute to meeting the challenges and reinforcing the Gulf's relations with the different regions of the world.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your participation. I am absolutely confident that your participation will enrich the forum proceedings and will yield recommendations, which will strengthen the security and stability of the region.

Wa al Salam alaikmu wa rahmatu Allah wa barakatu !