OPENING CEREMONY

His Excellency Anas Al Feky, Egyptian Minister of Youth, and Chairman of the Executive Bureau of Arab Ministers of Youth,
Ambassador Nancy Bakeer, Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs, Arab League,
Dr. Marie Louise Correa, Chairman of the World Scout Committee,
Mr. Mohamed Al Triki, Chairman of the Conference and member of the World Scout Committee,
Mr. Mustafa Juma Salem, Chairman of the Arab Scout Committee,
Mr. Fawzi Farghali, Director of the Arab Scout Regional Office,
Leaders of Arab Scout associations,
Scout Sisters and Brothers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference takes place at an historical turning point for the Arab Region: 50 years since the foundation of the Arab Scout Organization. But celebrating anniversaries should not be a time for us to look to the past. On the contrary, looking at what we have achieved should give us the energy to look forwards, to prepare ourselves to face new challenges. As we approach 2007 and the first hundred years of the Scout Movement, we are not concentrating on reaching the date of our centenary, but to a new start.

With the tremendous acceleration of globalization, the world has changed considerably in the last ten to fifteen years. Communication and transport technologies have dramatically reduced both physical and mental distances offering unprecedented opportunities for many young people to share ideas, knowledge and experience. At the same time, too often, distances between rich and poor, between advantaged and disadvantaged people, have grown.

Most young people live in poor countries, cut off from human progress and opportunities. They may drink Coke, but often lack clean water. On TV they see the glamorous prosperity of richer societies, but must resign themselves to living without any chance of having such prosperity themselves.

More than half of those who are of working age are jobless, and too many children are prematurely involved in hard labour. Too many children find the street to be their only home, a home which exposes them to risky behaviour, crime and violence.

Tension and conflicts are constantly increasing. Youth are becoming involved in conflict around the world with alarming frequency, either as victims or, just as tragically, as soldiers.

Almost a hundred years ago, on the small British island of Brownsea, our Founder, Robert Baden Powell – B-P as we all call him, unknowingly started the Scout Movement when he brought together 20 boys of different social classes. For ten days they lived, played, sang and camped together. Could they have imagined what Scouting would become?

In 1920, Scouts from all over the world gathered for the first World Jamboree. Scouting was breaking cultural barriers, bringing together Scouts from countries that had been fighting each other until just a few years before. The same thing happened after World War II, and more recently in other areas of conflict. There are many more examples of Scouts actively working for peace.

Scouts promise to be friends to everybody and brothers and sisters to every other Scout, no matter what their religion, language, ethnic background, skin colour, social or economic conditions. In Scouting, differences do not represent distance, but an opportunity to learn from others, and experience solidarity.

More people need to know that investing in Scouting is the best investment society can make for peace.

We don’t need to re-invent Scouting, nor give up its values, but to be effective Scouting has to open more to others; understanding their aspirations and interpreting their dreams, we must give more young people the opportunity to join. More than ever there is a strong need for renewed commitment by every Scout to overcome differences, to break barriers, to work for social justice.

Day by day, let’s transform our Scout Promise into a gift to humanity...into a “Gift for Peace”.

2 December 2004