



Diplomats gather to listen to Badr Al Dafa introducing the GOA

formal announcement on the formation of the GDA. In May this year in Marrakech, Morocco, GDA will present the foundation treaty to the alliance's founding member states (expected to be around 20 in number), a culmination of more than three years of strategising, diplomatic maneuvering and cementing partnerships. The architect of the initiative, Badr Al Dafa, in his introductory remarks said that this might be a small start but the problem they were trying to address was large and increasingly urgent, compounded by growing populations, climate change and conflict.

"Our aim is to eliminate poverty and hunger in dryland countries, contributing to their peace and security," Ambassador Al Dafa told the gathered diplomatic corp, representing various nations like Mexico, Netherlands, Chad, Morocco, Spain, India and more. "We hope you will support us irrespective of whether you are a dryland nation or not," he said. Multilateral cooperation is at the very core of GDA, its small secretariat channeling resources across the intricate web that connects ministries, the private sector, the United Nations, international banks, NGOs and research institutes. A job that Qatar, which in recent years has proved its diplomatic chops, is perfectly prepared to undertake. More so under the stewardship of Ambassador Al Dafa, a career diplomat who, among other things, was previously the Ambassador of Qatar to the United States and served as Under Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

He says the nitty-gritty of putting the GDA together has taken a while be-

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cause he has been working closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Program and other such entities to look into the charter and help set up the organisation.

Many entities today are producing valuable research and implementing development programmes in drylands and GDA's role would be to serve as a link between these and the member states and to establish preventive and responsive measures while crafting integrated food security policies to address the needs of the individual states in making them food-secure. "Additionally there will be a price monitoring unit to predict fluctuations in the cost of important food items and effort to stockpile food that can be bought at a reasonable

price by member states during a crisis."

"Qatar learnt a valuable lesson during the global food crisis of 2008. We and other countries in the region have successfully created national food security programmes and have had a few success stories. Through this alliance we can transfer some of these experiences to benefit other lesser developed countries," he says.

The member states will be required to make means-based contributions to keep the secretariat functioning but in turn, the GDA will help countries without significant financial means to tap into development funds from various financial partners like the World Bank, African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and Asian Development Bank or foreign aid to fund their agriculture, water and energy programmes. "GDA will be someone to rely on for support, advice and intervention for our members," he says.

Ambassador Al Dafa says Qatar has long been a benefactor to many developing countries outside the framework of formal organisations like these. "Looking at how many countries are facing the threat of food insecurity, we decided we needed an international platform that is not just bilateral. A collective effort was needed to address this issue and its various connected challenges."

Ambassador Al Dafa's voice softens as he talks about hunger and revolution. "Food is the prime mover behind political stability," he says. "At least that is my personal interpretation of the Arab Spring. People were hungry." And more than guns, tanks and Scud missiles, it is efforts like these that will bring peace to many of the troubled parts of the world. ■