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Attorney General Eric Holder Delivers Remarks at the Arab Forum on Asset Recovery

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Thank you for those kind words – and thank you all for such a warm welcome.

Excellencies; distinguished guests; Minister [Abdelah] Baha; Minister [Mohamed] Louafa; Minister [Mustapha] Ramid; Minister [Mohamed] Mobdie; and honored colleagues – it is a pleasure to be with you today in this beautiful city. And it is a privilege to bring greetings from President Barack Obama and the American people.

I would particularly like to thank His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Prime Minister [Abdelilah] Benkirane, and the entire government of the Kingdom of Morocco, for welcoming each of the delegations that has traveled here this week – including my colleagues from the U.S. delegation – to take part in this important Forum. By hosting this critical gathering and contributing to the advances we've seen over the past year, the Moroccan government has shown clear and consistent leadership in helping to shape the future we must build together. Alongside our friends and colleagues from the United Kingdom, who have worked diligently to help organize this year's Forum, you've brought a remarkable group of international partners together to discuss urgent challenges. And I want you to know how grateful I am for the opportunity to join you in closing what's been a productive and rewarding conference.

We come together this year at a time of reflection and renewal – in a moment of progress and possibility; of challenge as well as opportunity. It was 14 years ago, in Washington, D.C., when then-Vice President of the United States Al Gore convened the very first Global Forum on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity – an initiative that reflected a growing international willingness to acknowledge corruption as a problem that every country must face.

Since that time, international leaders have repeatedly come together – in a variety of ways – to foster widespread consensus on the need for collective action in the face of shared challenges. And our nations have together accomplished a great deal.

In recent years, we've joined hands to draft and bring into force the United Nations Convention Against Corruption – the first global anti-corruption treaty. That treaty was a critical part of a record of groundbreaking transnational cooperation on issues ranging from anticorruption to counterterrorism; from cyber security, to judicial reform, to intellectual property enforcement. And more recently – as the world has watched the winds of change sweep across this region – we responded by coming together in Doha last year to convene the first Arab Forum on Asset Recovery.

As we've all seen – and as President Obama has said – “[t]he struggle against corruption is one of the great struggles of our time.” Fortunately – thanks in part to the work of leaders like you – corruption is no longer widely seen as an accepted cost of doing business. It is no longer tolerated as an unavoidable aspect of government. On the contrary – it is now generally understood that the consequences of corruption are devastating – eroding trust in public and private institutions, undermining confidence in the fairness of free and open markets, siphoning precious resources at a time when they could hardly be more scarce, and all too often breeding contempt for the rule of law.

What makes this understanding remarkable is that it is accompanied, this week, by significant optimism: that corruption, despite its destructive power, can be overcome. That it is possible to make the progress we seek, and that our citizens deserve. And that our respective nations and governments have not only acceded to this recognition – we've summoned the political and institutional will to take a firm stand.

By convening this Forum, the community of nations represented here has helped to create a significant window of global opportunity – to discuss our respective experiences, to share knowledge and expertise, to refine our understanding of best practices, and to seek new avenues for communication and collaboration. We signal, by our presence in Marrakech today, our enduring commitment to the difficult work before us – and our unyielding determination to fight corruption wherever it exists, and however long it may take.

We acknowledge, of course, that the change we seek will not take hold overnight. But we stand resolved to work together as never before – in bilateral and multilateral ways – to take the risks

that reform entails. To locate and return stolen assets not for the benefit of those who wield power, but for the people whose futures depend on opportunity, prosperity, and progress. And to do everything possible to eradicate the public corruption and official misconduct that too often undermines the power – and promise – of civil society.

I know we're all mindful of the fact that this work could hardly be more critical. This is why – in 2009, during my first year as Attorney General – I was proud to help mark the beginning of a major step forward in Doha, when I joined Dr. [Ali bin Fetais] Al Marri and many of you in opening the sixth and final Global Forum on Combating Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity. We concluded the Global Forum series with a fresh resolve to continue its important work. And we left Doha more determined than ever to push for the full implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption; to recover and repatriate the proceeds of corruption; and to end immunity for officials who engage in corrupt activities.

The very next year, I announced the launch of the U.S. Department of Justice's Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative, at the African Union Summit in Uganda. Through this initiative, the United States took another significant step to make good on our commitment to help lead the fight against large-scale corruption – and to recover stolen funds so they can be used for their intended, legitimate purposes. We assembled a team of highly-skilled Department of Justice prosecutors to enhance our anticorruption activities and deny corrupt officials the benefit of the funds they stole. And we took steps to enhance the work that's been underway around the world for approximately two decades – during which, in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, and at the request of host nations – the Justice Department has placed U.S. prosecutors in our embassies to help build joint prosecutorial capacity with partners in dozens of countries around the world, including Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, and right here in Morocco. This exchange of prosecutorial expertise has greatly benefitted us, no less than our foreign partners: we are all stronger for working so closely together.

In particular, to support the G8 and Deauville Partnership Arab Asset Recovery Plan that brings us here today, I have instructed the Justice Department to appoint attorneys to work exclusively with Deauville transition countries and their regional partners on asset recovery and mutual legal assistance issues. These attorneys specialize exclusively in asset recovery work – coordinating case cooperation between the Deauville Partnership and the Justice Department's Kleptocracy Unit. And they work to identify and trace assets – in addition to conducting intensive courses on Asset Recovery – in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation,

the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and other law enforcement agencies. And we work closely with our invaluable colleagues at the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative of the World Bank and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

In my speech last year to the Arab Forum, I pledged that the Department of Justice would dedicate two of its senior attorneys to advancing this work. Nancy Langston, a trial attorney with the Department's Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section, has been hard at work in Washington D.C. since January – designing programs, working with our Deauville Partners, and traveling the region to deliver courses. I am also pleased to introduce Karen Norris, a trial attorney with 20 years of experience – including a Justice Department assignment in Afghanistan – who will be based in Qatar starting next week. My colleagues and I are grateful to the Qatar Anti-Corruption and Rule of Law Center for providing her a base of operations as well as a venue for regional seminars. She will be conducting professional development programs in asset recovery in coordination with the Department's Kleptocracy Unit – which is led by Dan Claman, and focuses on tracing and recovering assets from corrupt leaders, their families, and their cronies.

She will also assist Deauville Partners in coordinating with the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, which acts as the U.S. Central Authority and is responsible for mutual legal assistance between the United States and all international partners – and which has attorneys dedicated to facilitating requests from Deauville Countries. This Office maintains a team of attorneys who are devoted to this region – and are dedicated to facilitating requests from Deauville Partner countries. Jeffrey Olson and Dan Stigall, attorneys from our Central Authority, are here today and have worked with many of you on past cases. They meet regularly with your ministries and will prioritize mutual legal assistance requests from Deauville Partner countries to ensure they are executed quickly – and to the fullest extent possible. I also would like to express my thanks for the leadership provided on this issue by Mary Beth Goodman, of our National Security Staff, and Rob Leventhal, of our State Department. And I want to acknowledge the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs for their unstinting policy and financial support for these efforts.

These dedicated professionals – and their partners and counterparts throughout the region – will ensure that the forum's mission will endure, and its worthy efforts will continue, every day. As productive as this week's sessions have been, the fact is that meetings are no substitute for the relentless, day-to-day work of prosecutors and investigators on the front lines. And the

challenges before us will continue to provide ample work to engage all of the countries – including the United States – that have pledged to continue this worthwhile initiative through our next meeting and far beyond.

As a number of our speakers have discussed during this conference, the potential of a Middle East and North Africa Asset Recovery Network represents a promising next step forward. Even if such a network is informal at first, I am confident that – once it has developed appropriate lines of communication and operating procedures – it will solidify and help to institutionalize the work of investigators, prosecutors, and other expert practitioners in tracing, freezing, confiscating, and repatriating the proceeds of corruption and other financial crimes that have been shifted across national borders.

In addition, the mission of the Arab Forum can be continued by devoting careful attention to coordinated and comprehensive technical assistance – on financial investigations, asset confiscation, and the management of assets once they are frozen and eventually turned over to relevant governments. Deauville countries must work closely with technical assistance providers to advise them on how best to strengthen capacity and improve outcomes – because fighting against corruption never has been, and never will be, an easy task.

Like many of you, this is something I've seen firsthand. More than 35 years ago, I began my career as a young attorney prosecuting government officials in the United States who violated the trust of those they were sworn to serve. I came to understand that fighting corruption requires a great deal of patience and persistence. This is because many corruption cases are inherently complex, resource-intensive, and time consuming. International corruption cases are even more so.

Those with experience in tracing and seizing assets know that these cases take time – generally measured in years, rather than weeks or months – even under the best possible circumstances. Especially in situations where corrupt leaders have spent decades stealing money; layering their ill-gotten gains into shell companies, trusts, and investments; and obscuring money trails and concealing evidence of their illegal acts – progress is sometimes slow and often frustrating. But all of us must remain determined to keep forging ahead.

Over the years, we've learned that asset recovery cannot be successful unless we tear down old walls and build new bridges – working across borders and jurisdictions to approach our shared duties with a new level of commitment and understanding. We've seen that nations requesting

help locating stolen assets – some of which may have been laundered abroad – cannot necessarily expect host nations to be able to immediately locate and return assets stolen from a prior regime. States that have been called upon to provide assistance in such cases cannot necessarily expect that victim states will be able to pinpoint all of the assets and criminal activities involved at the outset of an investigation. Progress – and justice – can only be achieved by investing time and effort in forging the close partnerships that will allow us to consistently share information that's essential to the tracing and forfeiture of these stolen funds. Success in such ventures – coupled with the increased demand for international cooperation and mutual legal assistance – will require Central Authorities to be adequately staffed with legal experts who are empowered to communicate freely with international partners in order to provide needed information and evidence, to obtain assets, and to bring offenders to justice. Only then can countries fulfill their commitments under the U.N. Convention Against Corruption and the promise of this remarkable Forum. Our continued progress will necessitate the dedication of prosecutors and investigators with the independence to pursue cases objectively and fairly, without regard to political affiliation, status, wealth, or position. And it will demand the concerted action of our member countries to vindicate the rights of those harmed by the greed and dishonesty of a corrupt few.

As I said last year, in these and other efforts, the United States intends to serve not as a patron, but as a partner; not as a monitor, but as a collaborator. We stand ready to help and support institutions throughout the Middle East and North Africa. But each country will ultimately be the author of its own success. And my colleagues and I understand, as you do, that this work – though global in its reach – must begin at home.

This is why, as Attorney General, I've consistently worked to ensure that anticorruption remains a top priority for my colleagues at every level of the United States Department of Justice – within as well as beyond our borders. Although I believe we can all be encouraged by the actions we've taken in recent years – and the results we've obtained by working together – the fact is that we cannot yet be satisfied. And it's clear that – from Marrakech to London, from Cairo to Ottawa, from Tripoli to Berlin and across this globe – our critical work must continue. History tells us that progress is not inevitable – it requires leadership and innovation; patience and persistence; courage and humility. We will undoubtedly face setbacks and false starts in the months and years ahead. We will encounter resistance and opposition, at home and around the world.

But as long as we keep learning from one another, supporting one another, and striving to move forward as one community of nations – united by our methods as well as our objectives – I believe there's good reason for confidence in where our collaborative efforts will lead us from here. And I'm certain that this Forum, and those who have taken part in it, will leave an enduring legacy to future generations of world leaders – a legacy anchored in the shared values of honest governance, and defined by an unprecedented commitment to openness, just conduct, and the rule of law.

This is our promise – and this, in its most basic form, is the opportunity before us. As we accept and seize it – and as we look beyond this meeting to the challenges that lie ahead – I want you to know that the United States government is deeply grateful for your partnership. We will continue to count on your leadership. And we look forward to all that we must, and surely will, accomplish together – for our nations, and for the citizens we are all privileged to serve.

Thank you.