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'ARAB LEADERS MUST CHOOSE PATH OF MEANINGFUL REFORM OR MAKE WAY FOR THOSE WHO

WILL,' SECRETARY-GENERAL DECLARES IN HIGH-LEVEL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

United States Abhors Silence When Governments Massacre Own People; Russian Federation Says Demands for Regime Change, Military Intervention 'Risky Recipes'

In overcoming the challenges posed by the dramatic changes in the Middle East and North Africa, strict commitment to political reform and inclusiveness were needed, as well an international change in attitude towards the Arab world, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the Security Council in a meeting addressed by Government ministers and other high-level officials this morning.

"The spontaneous and home-grown democratic movements are a credit to the Arab people," Secretary-General Ban said, warning on the other hand against underestimating the challenges ahead. "We have reached a sober moment," he added in his opening statement to a meeting chaired by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom and attended by the Foreign Ministers of France, Guatemala, Russian Federation, Portugal and Germany, as well as the Secretary of State of the United States.

He stressed that "leaders must choose the path of meaningful reform, or make way for those who will", eschewing cosmetic change, corruption and cronyism. Minority rights must be protected. Women had a right to sit at the table, with real influence and safety from violence. "The deficit in women's empowerment has held back the Arab region for too long," he said. Opportunities for young people must also be created, he added.

In engaging with the emerging situation in the region, he said, it was crucial that the international community move beyond what he called the "damaging notion that the Arab world is not ready for democracy", as well as the assumption that security must take precedence over human rights. "These have the effect of keeping unrepresentative Governments in power — with little to show for democracy or security."

Surveying the ongoing challenges, Mr. Ban reiterated his calls for a peaceful and early transfer of power to a civilian Government in Egypt, the holding of inclusive dialogue and a meaningful reform process in Bahrain, the revival of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, and the peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. On Syria, he urged swift acceptance of newly appointed Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's proposals to end the violence, including what Mr. Ban called "shameful operations" against urban populations, and embark on an inclusive, Syrian-led political process.

Following Mr. Ban's introduction, the high-level officials representing several Council members hailed the struggles of the peoples of the region to realize their aspirations through participatory political systems and offered their Government's support of nationally led transitions. The British Secretary of State, speaking in his national capacity, said his country had convened the meeting to call for intensified

action in support of political and economic freedoms in the Middle East and for “urgent, essential Security Council action to stem the bloodshed in Syria”.

He said there was great hope in the United Kingdom that, within perhaps 20 years, the Arab region would be one of prosperous, open societies. He said that the Council must support United Nations-Arab League facilitation of a Syrian-led political process for that country. The United States Secretary of State added that respect for sovereignty did not demand that “the Council stand silent when Governments massacre their own people”.

The Russian Foreign Minister, however, evoked the situations in Libya and Syria to maintain that the goal of ensuring that transformations in the Middle East brought more gains than losses should not be achieved by misleading the international community or manipulating Council decisions. “Making hasty demands for regime change, imposing unilateral sanctions [...] making calls to support armed confrontation, and even to foreign military intervention — all of the above are risky recipes of geopolitical engineering that can only result in the spread of conflict,” he said. The Russian Federation’s approach on Syria, he reiterated, focused on a non-violent solution through Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue and implementation of overdue reforms.

Morocco’s representative, outlining reforms enacted by his Government, pledged more advances through “righteousness and law”. He stressed the need for regional cooperation, particularly economic integration as was now being pursued the North African Maghreb, in order to consolidate progress, and warned that stability and peace in the greater region could not be achieved without the Palestinians realizing their national aspirations. Guatemala’s Foreign Minister warned against overly facile generalizations about the prospects and strategies for transition in the region. Speaking from the experience of the democratic transitions in Central America, he stressed that, “there are no universally valid formulas for transitions”, as the cultural basis was extremely important. He also warned that plural and participatory systems were not easy to develop. “What is important is to persist and trust that millennium-old cultures that had contributed so much to the civilized world would find the strength, creativity and leadership to take their democratization process to safe port,” he said.

Also speaking this morning were representatives of Togo, China, India, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Colombia and Pakistan.

The meeting began at 10:53 a.m. and ended at 12:30 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this morning for a high-level meeting on “Changes in the Middle East”.

Opening Remarks

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that “the spontaneous and home-grown democratic movements are a credit to the Arab people”, but also noted that “we have reached a sober moment”, in view of the challenges of the road ahead as well as the cost in human suffering and loss of life. In Egypt, he continued to urge a peaceful and early transfer of power to a civilian Government, and in Bahrain, he urged the holding of all-inclusive dialogue and a meaningful reform process.

In Syria, he said, the peaceful call for democratic rights had turned into a dangerous spiral of violence as the Government had failed to fulfil its responsibility to protect its own people, and “shameful operations” against cities had taken a large toll, including women and children. It was urgent for the international community to stop the violence, he stressed, describing the visit to Syria by Kofi Annan, the newly appointed Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States. He urged President Bashar Al-Assad to act swiftly in response to Mr. Annan’s proposals to end the violence and embark on an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. Welcoming recent initiatives of the Russian Federation and China in that regard, he said it was crucial for the Council to speak strongly, with one voice, on the situation.

On the broader regional picture, he stressed that “leaders must choose the path of meaningful reform,

or make way for those who will", eschewing cosmetic change, corruption and cronyism. Minority rights must be protected. Women had a right to sit at the table, with real influence and safety from violence. "The deficit in women's empowerment has held back the Arab region for too long," he said. Opportunities for young people must be created; to absorb young entrants to the workforce, Arab countries needed to create 50 million jobs within the next decade.

In addition, he said: "A regional awakening based on the ideals of freedom, dignity and non-violence cannot be complete without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." He reiterated his appeals to Israeli and Palestinian leaders to embrace regional change and show the courage and vision needed to reach an historical agreement, pledging to remain engaged with the Quartet partners to assist the parties to realize two States living side by side in peace and security.

Avowing that the region would also benefit from an end to tensions over Iran's nuclear programme, he urged all sides to exercise the utmost care and restraint, commit to diplomatic efforts in good faith and comply with Council resolutions.

In engaging with the emerging situation in the region, he said, it was crucial that the international community move beyond what he called the "damaging notion that the Arab world is not ready for democracy", as well as the assumption that security must take precedence over human rights. "These have the effect of keeping unrepresentative Governments in power — with little to show for democracy or security."

He said that the United Nations too must update its approach. It was placing the full spectrum of its expertise at the disposal of the countries in transition and was strongly committed to doing its part to enable them to achieve peace and realize their potential.

Statements

Speaking in his national capacity, Council President WILLIAM HAGUE, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, said his country had convened the meeting to call for intensified actions in support of political and economic freedoms in the Middle East and for "urgent, essential Security Council action to stem the bloodshed in Syria". The Arab Spring had already spawned the most important political events of the twenty-first century and it was only right that it be discussed in the Security Council. Some people viewed that transformation with fear and consternation, but in Britain, it was viewed in a positive light and there was the hope that, within perhaps 20 years, the Arab region would be one of prosperous, open societies.

He said that if that openness could lead to a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians, the case for making the promise of the Arab Spring a reality was that much stronger. "Yet, if we downgrade our expectations [...] and allow Syria to descend into civil war, immense opportunities could be squandered." Indeed, there were immense challenges, but those merely strengthened the case for the international community to help build institutions, open economies and help bolster civil societies, where requested. In that, the international financial institutions, the Group of 8 most industrialized countries (G-8), and regional organizations had a major role to play. The European Union had made a "bold offer of support" to transitioning countries in the Arab region and the expectations must be met.

Human rights were universal and would spread by themselves over time, he said. That was not a new concept, and was indeed enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The inexorable nature of human rights was a truth that Governments ignored at their peril. When Governments responded with an iron fist to the legitimate hopes and dreams of their citizens, "they are doomed to failure". When people demanded rights, no amount of brutal repression could deter them. All Governments of the Arab region should adopt reforms in the spirit of economic freedom. The people of each country must determine their own future. But no Government could justify violence and the right of people to choose their own leaders.

He said the United Kingdom believed that economic and political reform went hand in hand; there could be no long-term stability without greater political openness. "The Arab Spring will be the work of a generation and we must be patient as transformations go forward," he said. The situation in Syria cast a "long shadow" over the Council's debate today. "In the eyes of the world, this Council has so far failed in

its responsibilities towards the Syrian people,” he said, stressing that it should be possible for the Council to demand an end to violence against civilians, call for unhindered access of relief workers and international media, and endorse the Arab League’s efforts. The Council should also support United Nations-Arab League facilitation of a Syrian-led political process. He called again on the Council to adopt a resolution to that end. The international community should act together in the spirit of the United Nations and show long-term support to the region.

ALAIN JUPPÉ, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of France, said the United Nations Charter had tasked the Council with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. The international community recognized the Council’s “responsibility to act” when violations of human rights were being committed “before the gaze of the world”. For France, the Arab Spring demonstrated the universal nature of democracy. It also showed that Governments that did not respect the rights of their people would fall. The transformations had not been without their challenges, and each democratic change brought with it the possibility of disappointment.

Yet, the transformations were also opportunities for peace. For example, he said, the Council had been called upon to act in the case of Libya, “taking the only honourable decision” that would save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. By adopting a resolution today extending the United Nations presence in that country, the Council continued to show its willingness to support Libya and the Libyan people. If the Council had been effective, it was because it had not only been able to answer the call of the peoples of the region, but also because it had scaled up effective cooperation with regional organizations. Yet, the meeting today was overshadowed by the situation in Syria, where a brutal regime continued to “clamp down” on its people.

He said the High Commissioner for Human Rights had determined that crimes against humanity were being committed there, as civilians continued to be killed and imprisoned. That violence must end and humanitarian workers must be admitted. Just like Hama some 30 years ago, Homs would remain a symbol of martyrdom in the history of humankind. Only by answering the legitimate demands of the people and implementing the reforms so sorely called for by them and the Arab League, would the violence be halted. There was no alternative to endorsing the decisions of the Arab League, he said, stressing that there should be no impunity, and there would come a day when the crimes and savagery that had been committed during the Syrian crisis would be brought before the International Criminal Court.

“It is our responsibility to act,” he said, adding that a draft resolution was under discussion to find a solution to the crisis. He called upon China and the Russian Federation to help the Council shoulder its responsibility.

He went on to say that the Council appeared to be powerless to address the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The Palestinian people were just as deserving of the right to have their legitimate aspirations addressed as the people of Syria. A two-State solution was the only viable one and the best chance of ensuring security for Israel. After so many years of failure and unanswered hopes, perhaps it was time for the international community to change its approach, he said, calling on the Council and all its partners to recommit to lasting peace.

As for Iran, France was increasingly worried about that country’s actions, including its continued defiance of the Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran had threatened to “wipe Israel off the map” and was repressing its people. Every day, the country was becoming more isolated from the international community. When a Government lost legitimacy in the eyes of its people, it was condemned, he said, calling for collective diplomatic action to address the Iranian nuclear issue. Finally he declared: “The promise of the Arab Spring is the universal right to fundamental freedoms, which we confirm.”

HAROLD CABALLEROS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, maintaining that it would be presumptuous at this point to offer interpretations of the Arab Spring, drew on the lessons learned in his own country, which, he cautioned, should not be generalized to sum up all experiences in Latin America. “There are no universally valid formulas for transitions,” he stressed. Cultural values mattered; it was important that everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, local affiliation, race or creed have access to the same opportunities. He was pleased that those values had been consolidated in his region.

He also warned that plural and participatory systems were not easy to develop; the agenda was complex and often required changes in course. "What is important is to persist and trust that millennium-old cultures that have contributed so much to the civilized world will find the strength, creativity and leadership to take their democratization process to safe port." The entire process must respond to the aspirations of the peoples involved and not be imposed from outside. Institutions for the administration of justice and the rule of law had been critical for democratization in Central America, as had been the strengthening of regional cooperation. Cooperation in resolving common problems and promoting mutual support strengthened democracy in each country. He saw a parallel in the increasingly important role being played by the League of Arab States.

Finally, he said that the promotion of economic and social development was imperative. "It is true that people demand liberty and dignity, but they also demand greater welfare, especially in societies that are marked by high levels of inequality."

SERGEY LAVROV, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said the goal of ensuring that transformations in the Middle East brought more gains than losses for the region and that changes were peaceful and democratic should not be achieved by misleading the international community or manipulating Council decisions. The organizations or nations that volunteered to implement Council mandates must give full account of their actions to the Council. He lamented the lack of an investigation thus far into civilian casualties due to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) massive bombings in Libya. The Council should clarify that matter by invoking the 2008 Joint Declaration on UN-NATO Secretariat Cooperation. Outside interference using raw military force increased the threat of the illicit spread of arms, thus jeopardizing regional stability. The international community should also draw "serious conclusions" about the situation in Syria, which remained of "grave concern".

"Making hasty demands for regime change, imposing unilateral sanctions designed to trigger economic difficulties and social tensions in the country, inducing the opposition to continue its confrontation with authorities instead of promoting dialogue, making calls to support armed confrontation, and even to foreign military intervention — all of the above are risky recipes of geopolitical engineering that can only result in the spread of conflict," he said. While Syrian authorities had a huge share of responsibility for the situation, they had also been battling combat units that had lately committed murderous terrorist attacks. Rather than discuss who had started the fighting, the priority should be to discuss "realistic and feasible" approaches to achieve a ceasefire. From the outset, the Russian Federation's approach was clear and consistent, and focused on a non-violent solution through Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue and implementation of overdue reforms.

He said that the 10 March agreement between the Russian Federation and the League of Arab States aimed to end the violence from all sources, install an impartial monitoring mechanism, eliminate outside interference, guarantee unimpeded humanitarian aid for all Syrians and provide strong support for the mission of the Joint Special Envoy on the Syrian crisis, Kofi Annan, to launch political dialogue between the Government and opposition groups.

The Arab Spring should in no way be used as a pretext to weaken attention to the Palestinian issue. The potential for conflict in the Middle East and Northern Africa would remain high until a comprehensive settlement was achieved, he said. The Quartet should start working regularly and persistently to create an environment conducive for continued direct Israeli-Palestinian contact aimed at full-fledged negotiations. He called for closer cooperation between the Quartet and the League of Arab States. He welcomed Jordan's initiative in January to host a series of useful meetings between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, Secretary of State of the United States, paid tribute to those in North Africa and the Middle East who had acted on universal aspirations to struggle for change. "They deserve and demand our collective support," she said, stressing, however, that the changes must be owned by the peoples involved.

Turning to specific situations, she said that today's adoption reflected continued commitment to Libya on the part of the international community. She pledged to continue to support the efforts of the United Nations

Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in the areas specified by the resolution. She noted the appreciation expressed by Libya's Prime Minister last week, commenting that there were no more rationalizations needed for the actions taken to support the Libyan people in 2011. The test there, however, would be the emergence of a working democracy. On Yemen, she said that holding firm on the transition there had also yielded fruit, although many challenges remained with which the international community must remain engaged.

On Syria, she regretted that the Council had been blocked from acting. Respect for sovereignty, she maintained, did not demand that "the Council stand silent when Governments massacre their own people". It was time to back the initiatives of the Arab League and allow the Syrian people the same opportunity to shape their future as others had in the region.

Responsive Governments, vital civil society and thriving economies were the objectives in the entire region, she said. Gradual changes towards that goal must be supported; all parties, including the Islamist parties, must be judged by what they actually did, she stressed, enumerating the standards against which all in the international community should be measured, including pluralism and respect for the rights of women. A foundation for inclusive, private-sector-based growth was also critical, she said, calling for the approval and reinforcement of a programme for Egypt of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

She denied that the concept of civil society was an imposition of the West, and called for measures to strengthen it in the wider Middle East. Among other matters, she said it was important that Palestinians achieved their independent State through a negotiated peace that was not dictated from the outside. She condemned the renewed rocket fire from Gaza and called on all sides to make every effort to restore calm. It was up to the people and leaders of the region to resist demagoguery and build prosperous democratic societies, which required continuous, long-term commitment on the part of all.

PAULO SACADURA CABRAL PORTAS, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Portugal, said that although unpredicted, the popular uprising of the Arab Spring had proven some "old rules" of politics: failure to reform led to revolution and Governments that lost a sense of history were bound to end up on the wrong side of it. Before too long, the world had condoned autocratic regimes, looked away from their repressive actions and shied away from the calls for freedom and respect for human rights. "The upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt shook the foundations of this paradigm," he said. The massacre in Benghazi had stirred the international community to action in defence of the values of the United Nations. What was happening in the Arab world offered a unique opportunity for the countries of the region and the wider international community. Indeed, stakeholders must support the transitioning countries as they followed through with their decisions to elect democratic Governments, foster the rule of law, promote human rights, value the rights and roles of women and pursue economic progress.

"In order to do so, we must be clear in our aims and principles, while striving to avoid old mistakes," he continued, adding that Portugal considered it essential for the people in the respective countries to choose their own paths. "We are witnessing home-grown, popular-led processes, which are the result of the courage and the will of these societies." The international community must also realize that there was no "one-size-fits-all" solution. It was essential to resist exporting political models — "human rights are universal; political models are specific". Also crucial was to avoid judging the countries based on their religious and cultural beliefs and to prioritize social cohesion. While calling on the international community to exercise patience with countries such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, he said that, unlike those situations, Syria had, unfortunately, become a tragedy.

Even as the Council met, the campaign of ruthless repression against the Syrian people was continuing. Human rights, including the right to basic humanitarian assistance, were systematically being violated. President Assad's Government had remained deaf to calls for reform from his own people, as well as from the Arab League and the United Nations. He regretted that the Security Council had not been able to take a forceful, unified position to the violence and make way for a Syrian-led political process, reflected in the decisions adopted by the Arab League. "How long can we sit still while the Syrian regime pushes the country into bloody sectarian conflict and civil war," he asked, stressing that the mission of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan must be supported, particularly as it "represents the last opportunity to prevent Syria from spiralling into civil war".

He called on the international community to generate the political will to ensure a two-State solution

enabling Israelis and Palestinians to finally live together in peace. Everyone knew that was the only viable solution. Fulfilling the legitimate ambitions of both sides could only be attained through serious and credible negotiations between the parties. "We need concrete and tangible actions that bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiation table," he said, adding that along with the Quartet and Arab leadership, Europeans had a particular responsibility and must play an active role to break the deadlock.

GUIDO WESTERWELLE, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, said that change had come to the Arab world because the peoples of the region, especially the youth, had stood up for freedom, participation and dignity. He congratulated the peoples of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, as well as of Morocco and Jordan on their respective progress. The changes, which had been broadly supported by the Arab League, reflected the start of a globalization of values as people all over the region and the world were demanding their universal human rights. Indeed, the values of the United Nations were gaining ground, and while those changes were only a beginning, Germany had taken an early decision to assist those countries with their transitions while remaining well aware that reform must come from within; each country in the Arab region must follow its own path at its own pace.

"Many in the West fear the rise of Islam. But the notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible is wrong. We have engaged in dialogue with democratic Islamic parties," he said, adding that Germany and the West were ready to respect cultural traditions, while simultaneously looking for clear commitments to human rights and the rule of law, religious tolerance, respect for minorities and women's real participation. The changes in the region had made progress towards a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine all the more urgent, and in that regard, he welcomed today's meeting of the diplomatic Quartet. All parties must do everything to ease tensions and to avoid an escalation on the ground, he said, emphasizing that he was deeply worried by the flare-up in violence around Gaza over the weekend, and called for the shelling of innocent civilians to end.

On other issues, he said the Iranian nuclear programme challenged the stability of the region and the international non-proliferation regime. "A nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable," he declared, stressing that there was still time for diplomacy. As for Yemen, he said that the election of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour al-Hadi marked an important milestone in the political transition there. Nevertheless, Yemen continued to face tremendous political challenges, and the people of that country deserved the international community's support. Continuing, he said that while "there has been much discussion in this room" about Syria, thus far, one year after the popular uprising that sparked the political crisis, the Council had failed to live up to its responsibility. As a result, peaceful protests were now being put down with "horrific" violence. That violence must end, "and it must end now". Germany had been working with the international community to find a political solution, and he called on China and the Russian Federation "to open the way for this Council to take action".

KODJO MENAN (Togo), recalling the dramatic developments that had occurred since a vendor had sacrificed himself in Tunisia, said the changes that had ensued were comparable to those of the French Revolution. He cautioned that more time and more sacrifices, however, would be needed to achieve the goals of stable democratic societies. Re-establishing peace and national unity was primary, as was the provision of emergency humanitarian aid in all the countries involved. The responsibility to protect should be invoked when needed. Freedom of expression, the right to choose leaders and general good governance were critical to foster development. The new democratic countries must be helped with substantial economic aid, "so that young people would no longer have to resort to gestures of despair", he said, concluding that "for hope to bear fruit, it must be supported".

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) said the changes in the region were diverse in their scope, depth and methods, but they had resulted in the birth of genuine hope. At the same time, the peace of the region was threatened by the occupation policies of Israel. The Council must promote progress on that situation as soon as possible, and the international community must influence those in the area to bring about the two-State solution. He welcomed the changes in Tunisia, and said that the Libyan people had emerged victorious and liberated, with the firm and appropriate support of the Arab League and the Security Council. He hoped that Egypt's revolution would deliver on the aspirations of its people and expressed regret at the tragedy that the people of Syria were enduring, welcoming the appointment of Mr. Annan and hoping that his efforts would accelerate an end to the violence and the provision of humanitarian aid. The Council must speak with one voice in supporting the Arab League, he commented.

He said that the reform programme launched in Morocco had contributed to individual and social freedom through constitutional reform, the election of a Government committed to combating corruption and to measures to increase participation of women in public life, among other progress. He pledged more advances through “righteousness and law”. Regional cooperation was necessary, however, to consolidate progress, through economic integration. There had been unprecedented movement in that regard in the North African Maghreb over the past year and he hoped that that progress would continue. In achieving a democratic transition of the region, great obstacles must be overcome, but he assured the Council that the Arab peoples were capable, each in their own ways, to meet those challenges and ensure necessary stability. International support was crucial in that regard and he hoped that the international community would not disappoint those who were struggling to realize important common values.

LI BAODONG (China) said the situation in the Middle East was undergoing unprecedented changes; some developments had been challenging and had drawn the concern of the wider international community. World peace would remain in serious jeopardy unless political and economic stability reigned in the Middle East. For its part, the international community must “think rationally” about how it could best support the desires and demands of the peoples of the region. “The people of the Middle East are masters of their own destiny,” he said, expressing the hope that all parties in the region would seek change through dialogue and negotiation.

He said the international community must respect the territorial integrity of the countries of the Middle East and must provide assistance that would help them solve their challenges by political means. China remained against any form of external-led regime change. He also said that Security Council resolutions must be implemented fully, and not selectively. China also called on humanitarian actors to abide by the rules and principles of the United Nations Charter; it was against any actions that might lead to territorial intervention under the guise of humanitarian assistance. He said the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was at a standstill, and the entire international community must recommit to ensuring a negotiated solution. China welcomed the earlier meeting among the Quartet principles.

As for Syria, he said that China had advanced a six-point proposal towards a solution to that question and he called on Syrian parties to immediately begin negotiations on a political process. Stakeholders must abide by international principles when providing support to those parties. China had repeatedly sent high officials to Syria, and he called on the international community to create a positive atmosphere that would assist the good offices of Joint Special Envoy Annan. China had no political interests in the Syrian issue; its efforts were guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter. China followed the principle of non-interference and other Member States should as well. As a permanent Council member, it was ready to assist the body in carrying out its responsibilities towards a peaceful, negotiated settlement regarding the Syrian crisis.

HARDEEP SINGH PURI (India) said the unrest in North Africa and Western Asia, which had begun more than a year ago, was rooted in the desires of the people to play a greater role in shaping their political and economic destinies. Those aspirations would not be met through violence or armed struggle. Nor could solutions be prescribed from the outside. “In fact, given the history of foreign interference, such prescriptions will not only be suspect in the eyes of the people, but may also have the potential to exacerbate the problems,” he said, urging the international community to use all the tools of diplomacy at its disposal to address the regions’ challenges so the individual countries could carry out inclusive transitions while maintaining social cohesion.

While the solutions to the problems varied from country to country, he said it was clear that neither military intervention nor arming civilian populations should be considered. Such courses of action would only fuel further bloodshed and instability and create new marginalized groups. They also risked breeding extremism and intolerance, the adverse consequences of which could ultimately be felt far beyond the regions concerned. Recalling the words of Mahatma Gandhi, he said: “Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind.” Indeed, throughout the past year, in situations where changes had taken place without violence, those societies had returned to normal faster and reforms had been implemented in smoother fashion. As such, India was of the view that the leaders of North Africa and Western Asia should resolve problems through inclusive internal political processes that met the aspirations of the people in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed.

He went on to say that the international community must remain cognizant of the need to

comprehensively tackle the Arab-Israeli issue. Indeed, that issue must not get lost in the “din and preoccupation caused by other situations in the region”. Also, the international community risked further violence in the region if the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people were not met. Their protests could become radicalized unless concrete action was taken to end the occupation of all Arab lands so that all the people of the region could live in peace and build cooperative relations. “Moreover, the call of the international community for democratic reform sounds hollow to Palestinians and other peoples living under occupation,” he said, urging “immediate measures”, including an end to all settlement construction and favourable consideration by the Council of the Palestinian application for membership in the United Nations.

BASO SANQU (South Africa) said that the protests that swept the Arab world represented a cry for political emancipation from decades of totalitarianism, as well as for proportionate distribution of wealth and power, and other life enablers. “The social contract in these societies has been broken down irretrievably,” he commented, while youth unemployment and other ills soared. Governments in the region should have responded to that situation. The resulting turmoil had regional and international effects, including rising oil prices, increased numbers of refugees, proliferation of weapons and increased tensions between nations.

The African continent had been adversely affected as a result of the undesirable spill-over effects of the revolutions, particularly, he said, “in the aftermath of the military action that was carried out by NATO to effect regime change in Libya under the guise of Security Council resolution 1973 (2011)”. He said that military action, therefore, should be avoided when political solutions could still be pursued. To avoid further negative consequences, Governments should respect the will of their people. In addition, it was critical that the Council take into account the link between development and security, and strengthen conflict-prevention strategies. Partnership with international financial institutions was critical to countries in transition, and reconciliation and rule-of-law initiatives in those countries should be supported by the Council.

He cautioned the international community, however, against using the plight of the Arab peoples to pursue self-interest and regime change. He underlined the importance of working with regional and subregional organizations on all the challenges related to changes in the Arab world, adding that the plight of the Western Saharan and Palestinian peoples must not be forgotten. He hoped that efforts to improve the lives of all the region's peoples would aim to create an environment within which citizens could live in harmony and fulfilment.

AGSHIN MEHDIYEV (Azerbaijan) said using violence as a way to achieve political objectives would not lead to democracy. Nor could democracy be imposed from the outside. Instead, all national and regional processes should focus on progress in economic and democratic development. He lauded the reconciliation efforts of national authorities in many Arab countries that aimed to negotiate with all political groups to find effective solutions. He regretted the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, but commended Jordan's consistent efforts to revive the dialogue and resume negotiations for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. He expressed deep concern over continuing illegal settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which impacted Palestinians' rights and freedoms, seriously damaged the peace process and threatened the two-State solution and emergence of a viable Palestinian State. In contrast to other well-known situations involving groundless, illegitimate territorial claims under the guise of caring for ethnic minority groups, the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and statehood was legitimate. It was crucial to apply relevant international legal norms, urgently remove the adverse impact of military occupations and discourage their practice.

The Council could not remain indifferent to situations involving serious humanitarian and human rights law violations, he said. It must react adequately in order to put an end to illegal practices and policies. The only solution to the worrisome situation in Syria was through an all-inclusive and Syrian-led political process in which all national stakeholders showed determination to solve the crisis peacefully. He encouraged all parties to fully cooperate with Joint Special Envoy Annan. Repression would not bring peace or security. Governments that suppressed basic freedoms would always be unstable. As a country suffering from prolonged occupation of its territories, Azerbaijan believed that the same understanding should apply to inter-State relations. The behaviour of Governments that resorted to force to capture territory of another sovereign State and authorized attacks on civilians and ethnic cleansing should not be tolerated. The international community must unite to reject such repressive policies and uniformly apply international law.

NÉSTOR OSORIO (Colombia) said change in countries of the Middle East and North Africa had been

sparked by young populations that were expressing their desires through popular movements in societies characterized by political exclusion and economic deficiencies. Despite those similarities, the case of each country should be judged and examined on its own merits, while efforts must be made to ensure social cohesion, protection of fundamental rights, the promotion of political freedoms and women's empowerment. All that required time and decisive international support. All sectors of the impacted societies must converge around common goals, so as to avoid tensions and polarization while new institutions were built.

Turning to the situation in Syria, he said the violations of human rights being carried out there must be "robustly condemned and rejected", especially by the Security Council. Colombia had been working with the international community to ease the crisis, and the Council must use all means available to it to end the violence and protect civilians. Such actions must adhere to the Charter's call for respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The international community must also draw on the expertise of the Arab League and other regional bodies that had a better understanding of the on-the-ground political and the cultural contexts. Overall, the Arab Spring provided an opportunity for newly formed Governments to anchor their societies and intuitions in the rule of law, democracy, fundamental human rights and respect for the will of the people.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON ([Pakistan](#)), recalling the work of Stephen Hawking, said the renowned scientist had warned that "dark space" was neither inert nor inactive. That was something the international community should remember; stakeholders should remain vigilant because any and every situation held the potential for challenge. Important developments were under way in North Africa and the Middle East, and Pakistan affirmed the right of the people of the region "to speak as well as to be heard". He condemned the use of force against peaceful protestors, as well as violations of human rights, no matter who was committing them. Pakistan supported all actions that favoured changes in the region in line with the Charter's principles, especially sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, he said that no movement in the world succeeded without external help, and those "riding on the high horse of morality" should consider treading more slowly. Nevertheless, change must be locally driven and not imposed from the outside.

Yet, the Arab Spring would never be complete without peace between Arabs and Israelis, he said. While the spring season was a natural occurrence, the current stalemate between Palestinians and Israelis was "the winter of Arab discontent". Indeed, Israel's ongoing settlement activity and demolition of Palestinian infrastructure increased tensions on the ground. The Council had not produced any cogent decision. Pakistan believed that now was an appropriate time to urge Israel to stop "land grabbing". The biggest challenge of the Middle East remained the Palestinian question, and the Palestinian people must benefit from the Arab Spring. On broader issues, he said Islam and democracy were not incompatible; the Muslim religion was grounded in the search for brotherhood and peace.

He said it was perhaps time for the General Assembly, supported by the Security Council, to take a legislative decision regarding minimum, internationally agreed requirements for democracy. Such conditions might include, for example, the promotion of human rights, pluralism, rule of law and the role of women. He also urged that the "situation with Iran" could be stopped from moving towards conflict. It might very well be the "last straw that broke the camel's back" for international peace and security.

Taking the floor again, Mr. LOULICHKI ([Morocco](#)) said that one delegation had thought it a good idea to raise issues that had absolutely nothing to do with the debate and had made "ill-founded and unfortunate comparisons" with some of the situations being discussed. Morocco did not wish to continue along such a path or to tarnish the positive message it hoped would emerge from today's meeting. Each and every person must contribute to that aim.

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