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PC.DEL/681/12

9 July 2012

ENGLISH only

*Statement by Mr. Hesham Youssef  
Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League  
Before the 2012 Annual Security Review Conference  
of the OSCE Regarding Developments  
in Middle East*

*Working Session IV: OSCE Partners for Cooperation*

*28 June 2012*



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I would like at the outset to thank the OSCE for inviting the Arab League to address this important meeting. We highly value our cooperation with the OSCE.

The Arab world is finally passing through its transitional period towards democracy and rule of law. Every country is unique but change is, and will remain in the foreseeable future, the name of the game.

Each country will have its own Mohamed Bo Azizy. Each country will have its own Tahrir square. Each country may also have its own slogan for its revolution whether it is freedom, social justice, dignity or otherwise.

A number of countries in the OSCE have recently passed through their own transitional period. They know that it is hard. It is painful. It is chaotic but I am sure that they also know that it is worth it.

Democracy has a price and if this is the price that we have to pay to achieve democracy, then so be it.

Today, a number of Arab countries are suffering from political instability, lack of security and economic decline. But despite all the difficulties facing the Arab world, the situation in a number of Arab countries is and will continue to improve like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

Others will continue to suffer from ups and downs like Yemen and Bahrain. In other countries still the situation will get worse before it gets better like Syria and perhaps the Sudan that seems to be on its way to join the Arab awakening.

The criteria is clear, regimes that will follow a path that satisfies the aspirations of their people will survive. If not then they only have themselves to blame. This is what Morocco is aiming to achieve and Jordan as well but Morocco is probably moving at a faster pace and perhaps with a higher degree of success.

Transitional authorities in a number of Arab countries are having all kinds of difficulties in managing the transitional period. They made all kinds of mistakes particularly in dealing with questions pertaining to



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inclusiveness, enforcing security, managing the economy, ensuring transparency and the credibility of the media and more.

However, we also have to recognize the daunting challenges facing these transitional authorities under very difficult, very complicated and even chaotic circumstances.

The coming period will be even more challenging because Arab societies will have to deal with difficult questions pertaining to the relation between church and state and the role of political Islam, questions of transitional justice and reconciliation. constitutional issues and achieving the right balance between different authorities and to ensure that the rule of law would prevail, dealing with minorities, ethnicity and religion on the basis of citizenship and citizenship alone, responding to the aspirations of people demanding social justice as well as dealing with enduring questions like poverty, unemployment, education and healthcare.

I will focus in my statement on three main issues: the situation in Egypt, developments in Syria, and the Palestinian question, and perhaps in the discussion period we can address developments in other Arab countries like Tunisia, Libya, Yemen or the Sudan.

As an Egyptian, I am extremely proud that the Egyptian president was elected with less than 52% of voters. This is the best response to the few voices that thought that Egypt was not ready for democracy. They were absolutely wrong. This outcome also sends an unmistakable message to the next president.

The important thing is that the Egyptian president steer away from what millions of Egyptians feared about elections that it was a competition between politics in the name of God and a new version of military rule. Two options that were categorically opposed by the revolution.

The question now lies with the president, how inclusive will he be, how will he choose his cabinet, his advisors and key officials in his administration.

The rhetoric since the announcement of the outcome of the elections has been reassuring and constructive to millions of Egyptians but public opinion will be waiting impatiently for his actions and his choices.



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Let me also indicate that there was a prevailing perception among large portions of liberal political forces in Egypt in the period after the elections and before the announcement of the outcome, that a number of major western powers were in support of a particular candidate and were putting pressure to ensure that he is announced the winner.

This led to widespread criticism and even condemnation by these liberal forces that are strong advocates for democracy, rule of law and countless values that they share with the international community. I believe that it will be important for this perception to be addressed in a serious manner.

Let me turn to the recent developments in Syria. I have to underline at the outset that it is shameful for all of us that innocent people continue to die every day in Syria. There is no excuse for the rising death toll and suffering of the Syrian people.

The Arab League has been working on a number of fronts regarding Syria:

- 1- the implementation of measures aiming to put pressure on the Syrian regime to end violence and bloodshed.
- 2- working with the UN to see how we can impose compliance with the Annan plan.
- 3- conducting intensive consultations to persuade major powers to adopt additional measures to end this crisis. Consultations with a number of partners were held recently including important consultations with Russia in this regard.
- 4- we worked with the P5 to see how the Russian proposal of establishing a contact group can be implemented and it was agreed that it will meet in the coming few days in Geneva, on Saturday to be more exact.
- 5- extensive effort was exerted to unify opposition forces. For the first time since the crisis started, it was agreed in a recent meeting in Istanbul to establish a committee to prepare for a meeting of the opposition which will take place in Cairo on the first of July.

Despite all this effort there are real fears that the crisis will become increasingly sectarian raising the risk of an all-out civil war. Further deterioration may also lead to increased divisions and tensions in both



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Lebanon and Iraq, as well as possible tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

We have to use the meetings that are going to be convened in the coming few days to send a clear message to the Syrian people that the international community will be able to exert the necessary pressure to end the bloodshed and allow the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations.

Finally, the crucial issue affecting peace and security in the middle east, namely, the Palestine questions.

There are real fears in many circles in the Arab world that the upcoming US elections, the unwillingness or perhaps even the inability of Europe to take a leading role in relation to the Palestinian question plus the fact that many Arab countries are preoccupied with their internal predicaments and the unwillingness of Israel to move that all these factors mean that the status quo can be sustained for some time to come.

But in reality all what we are doing is to allow for a buildup of a new crisis to erupt particularly that at the same time Israeli policies are creating realities on the ground leading more and more people to reach the conclusion that a two state solution may no longer be possible.

Without a game changer that would revive hope in a peaceful settlement we may be forced to face yet another crisis in the not too distant future.

The Arab world has crossed the point of no return. There is no going back. In a few years time the region will become unrecognizable. No country will be able to escape the impact of change and the Arab awakening will succeed and sooner rather than later, many Arab countries will join the family of democratic nations.

Thank You.