

Libya

A Statement by

His Excellency

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And Head of Libyan Delegation

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Thank you Ms. Amos for that lovely introduction.

I would like to thank Council President Richard Haas for the kind invitation.

I would also like to thank Council member, and Vice Chairman of Human Rights Watch, Joel Motley and our Mr. Gregory Brown for their assistance with our visit.

And thanks to all of you for coming here today to join in this dialogue, to learn about, and hopefully to support Libya in this time of magnificent transformation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Libyan colleagues and I have had a wonderful visit here over the past few days, highlighted by meetings at receptions held by President Obama, Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and bilateral meetings with many distinguished

world leaders, of whom I mention Madam Secretary Hillary Clinton, British Prime Minister David Cameron, former president Bill Clinton, Senator John McCain, Secretary General of Nato, President of the European Council, Executive Director of the World bank, and many others. And I am delighted to be meeting with all of you today.

We have been heartened by the warm feelings of these world leaders for Libya and its revolution, the expressions of support, and offers for continued engagement and technical assistance.

The Libyan revolution has captured the world imagination since it broke out spontaneously on February 17 2011, and the world followed with great interest the heroics of the young Libyan Freedom fighters who came from all walks of life. They fought against overwhelming odds, sacrificed life and limb, and settled for nothing less than victory against the regime that oppressed them for 42 years. This victory was achieved nearly a year ago. With that, Libya

began the hard process of building a true democracy.

The process culminated on July 7 of this year with an election of the General National Congress, an election that all observers testified as free and fully transparent, and the General National Congress selected me as its first President. A new prime minister was elected less than 2 weeks ago by the Congress to begin the task of forming the first legitimate democratic government in Libya.

We have many difficult tasks ahead on the road to security, peace and democracy. We are fully aware of the difficulties and the dangers that we face, both within Libya and from outside, and I will discuss some of these challenges today.

One of the dangers came into stark reality on September 11 with the brutal terrorist attack on the US mission in Benghazi, in which Ambassador Christopher Stevens and 3 of his colleagues were killed. We mourned the death of the American victims and a number of their Libyan guards who died trying to defend them against overwhelming use of

force. We appreciated the measured response of the US administration. We shared with the American people in this tragic loss, because we too lost a great friend of Libya who understood the Libyan cause of freedom, and rendered tremendous support for which the Libyan people will always be grateful. We will defeat the terrorists who killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and who neither represent Libya, nor represent Islam; a religion of tolerance, love and peace. We will not rest until justice is done and the terrorists brought to justice. As President Obama said in speaking to the UN earlier this week "our future will be determined by people like Chris Stevens, not by his killers."

We will continue undeterred on the road for real democracy, by tackling the security situation which resulted from the power vacuum which was itself the result of the fall of the oppressive Gaddafi regime. We are now working hard to integrate the regional militias who kept order during our revolution into the new centralized Libyan armed forces. We are strengthening these military and

security forces under central commands. In addition to dealing with the security situation we are launching a major economic and social development plan, overhauling the deteriorated healthcare and educational systems, reforming the administrative system, and seeking to diversify our oil-dependent economy in order to provide meaningful job opportunities to all Libyans.

In a new Libya, we seek not revenge but reconciliation, not exclusion but inclusiveness. We will protect civil liberties and human rights, especially for women and minorities; we will fight corruption and poverty, and we seek a better standard of living for our people who have suffered through decades of deprivation.

During the decades of Gaddafi's rule, almost all of our government was centralized in Tripoli. In order to make our government more responsive and more effective, we are decentralizing many activities, including health and education, so that government will become less remote and more responsive to the needs of all Libyans. Increased

freedom for local governments is an important element of our new democracy, and we hope it would serve as a bulwark against any future effort to concentrate power in a central tyranny in Libya.

We seek an open economy and transparent system to rebuild our infrastructure, free the private sector to initiate projects, to create employment and to encourage entrepreneurship.

The new Libya will respect the United Nations Charter, and live in peace with its neighbors and the rest of the world community. We will confirm our African identity and engage with our African neighbors. We call for respect of human rights, including for women and minorities. We call for resolving all border conflicts through the international legal system. We affirm the role of the International Criminal Court and support all international organizations that promote the cause of peace, freedom, liberty, fairness, human rights and justice

We believe that there can be no durable peace in the world unless human and political rights are respected everywhere, and until there is justice and opportunity for all. Since some of these rights will invariably be viewed differently in different countries, moderation and mutual respect is crucial to maintaining a civil society. I have an example involving the American concept of freedom of speech, which I submit must live respectfully among other central ideals both in America and abroad. In my country, and for Muslims everywhere, mocking the Prophet Mohammed is a crime, and it is punished harshly. Even in America, as I understand it, the right to freedom of speech does not extend to the right to scream “fire” in a crowded theater. Recently a movie that was made in America mocked and denigrated the Prophet Mohammed in a shameless way, and I would suggest, this is not so different from screaming fire in a crowded theater. It is crazy, inflammatory, and certain to cause mayhem or a brawl, and this has happened around the Muslim world in reaction to this film. So, as President of a Muslim nation, I would ask Americans to please not artificially elevate freedom of speech above all

other principles and values and to instead exercise moderation and respect in the treatment of the Prophet Mohammed. Doing this will go far to enable the mutual respect and trust between Americans and Muslims on which we all rely, and ultimately upon which the future of the planet may rely. Thank you for please considering this mutually-respectful approach.

Libya has now turned a new leaf, from being run by a dictatorship that used terrorism and murder and blackmail as instruments of policy, in which the whims of a dictator became the laws of the land, to a country that respects its obligations under the United Nations Charter, calls for genuine peace based on justice, and cooperates with other nations of the world for the common interests of the people, but many challenges remain.

In addition to the physical security issues that I mentioned before, we have additional huge challenges: We need to create stable meaningful jobs for over 25% of our population, primarily young people. We need to create

housing, roads, power plants, schools, and hospitals, to make up for four decades of despotic Gaddafi rule, during which period many parts of the country received no investment. We need to recover as much as possible of the assets that were stolen by the Gaddafi regime or otherwise misappropriated, so that these assets are available to support the redevelopment of the New Libya. And we need to modernize and expand our energy production sector, as this is the economic engine that will be essential in supporting so much of Libya's development.

As in all great revolutions, the expectations among the people for immediate change far outrun what is actually possible in the short term, so there is presently great pressure on the young Libyan democracy to perform for our people. If we, the democratic government, fail to perform for our people, this will be a huge setback for our democracy. To successfully and expeditiously tackle the many challenges I just listed, Libya will need foreign partners, foreign investors, and foreign supporters, and we hope that many of these will come from the United States.

Let me close on a personal note. Just one year ago, I was living here in United States in Atlanta, in my 30th year in exile from Libya. Along with many other Libyans, some of whom are here with me in the room today, I was forced three decades ago to leave Libya after Gaddafi made several attempts to kill or capture me in Libya.

America kindly took me in, and I lived here for several decades while I formed and lead the National Front for the Salvation of Libya and I only returned to Libya last year. So I have a deep appreciation for America.

I learned many things here, but most centrally I learned the fact that the struggle for liberation from oppression is always long and hard. I know that Americans understand this. Whether it is liberation from an outside regime as America accomplished in its revolution in the 18th century, or liberation from domestic oppression and violence as America experienced in its civil war of the 19th century, or liberation from discrimination as America experienced

more recently in America's civil rights movement of the mid-20th century, Americans know that the road to freedom is long and rough and that there are few short-cuts.

Let me take this moment to thank America for your unwavering support, which has kept me going through many tough years and enabled me to reach my current position. Now the people of Libya have bestowed on me a great honor and have entrusted me with the heavy responsibility of guiding Libya's transition from tyranny to democracy, and of rebuilding the economy to support our young democracy. I hope that some of you will be able to help me to fulfill this heavy responsibility and thus help the new Libya to fulfill her full potential as a vibrant economy and as a new and open democracy.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome your questions.