

The Arab League would like to thank the Forum for 21. Century for initiating the discussion and organization of the conference on Syrian Crisis. The League would like to express a full support towards finding acceptable and reasonable solutions considering challenges standing in front of Syria and the League. The League is in hope of finding and reaching a common understanding among all participating nations.

## BACKGROUND

The Arab League recognizes the seriousness of the situation in Syria region and supports all necessary steps to be taken to prevent further bloodshed.

The revolutions that began to shake the Middle East in early 2011 tailored a new role for the Arab League. Arab uprisings have spread from one country to the next, unseating the decades-old regimes of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, and Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, and placing many others in jeopardy. By shaking the delicate power balance in the region, the revolutions have made the region more susceptible to outside intervention; thus the regional response to the regional developments has become an urgent need. In addition, some Arab leaders who are fearful that demands for democracy and freedom will spread to their countries have felt immediate need to pursue an active policy in order to control developments. Under these circumstances, Arab League has ascended to a central role in regional policy that is being pursued to address new challenges. Though Arab League decisions may seem country-specific, they are significantly shaping the future of the region. By condemning the Syrian and Libyan regimes for disproportionate use of violence against their own people, the Arab League has somewhat found rightful the demand of Arab people. With these decisions, the League has signaled that it would move away from ideas of Arab nationalism and Arab unity in pursuit of further integration with the international system.

The Assad regime's failure to fulfill its reform pledges contributed to the growth of protests into a nationwide issue. The Syrian government's response was violent. Mounting death tolls drew strong criticism from the international community, including Arab countries. The Syrian regime was largely condemned by the Arab countries for its heavy use of weapons against civilians at the beginning of Ramadan. Going one step further, Saudi Arabia and Qatar withdrew their ambassadors to Syria. However, these diplomatic moves were not a unified Arab position; many countries still abstained from bluntly criticizing the Assad regime.

The League called on Assad to stop the violence. The Arab League also demanded the initiation of talks between the Syrian government and opposition forces. The League decided to set up a Syrian Committee to guide the process in coordination with both the Syrian government and the opposition

The plan urged Syria to halt the violence, free political prisoners, open dialogue with the opposition, and allow observers and international media into the country.

Yet, the Syrian regime failed to open dialogue within the Arab League's prescribed timeline, triggering intense debates about measures against the Assad regime ranging from suspension of Syria's Arab League membership to imposition of diplomatic and economic sanctions. With death tolls estimated by the UN at 3500 from March through November, the Arab League suspended Syria's Arab League membership in its extraordinary meeting of November 12<sup>th</sup>

Following the suspension decision that came into effect on November 16th, the Arab League delivered another historic decision by imposing economic sanctions on the Syrian regime.

This decision manifested the League's willingness to see policies evolve in the post-Arab spring. The League has showed that it will intervene in member states' internal affairs when peoples demand such action. The Arab League's sanctions include a travel ban against scores of senior officials, a freeze on Syrian government assets in Arab countries, a ban on transactions with Syria's central bank, and an end to all commercial exchanges with the Syrian government. Complementing previously-imposed U.S. and EU sanctions, Arab League and Turkish sanctions have begun to cripple the Syrian economy. The combined effect of the sanctions first and foremost hurt foreign investment.

The search for new foreign investors in China and Russia did not yield immediate improvements on the economic chaos. In light of these developments, the Syrian economy may have experienced double-digit contraction

Suspension of Syria's Arab League membership in November 2011 could be characterized as a turning point in Arab league's 66-year old history. Since its establishment in 1966, Arab League's political position has been confined to narrowly-defined national interests of the member countries. In that sense, the League's recognition of the Syrian people's demands for democracy and freedom proved to be a critical step. The recent active and interventionist role that the League has endorsed in Libya and Syria hints at the first signs of

change in the League's traditional status-quo oriented policies.

Peaceful protests that began in Syria turned into an armed conflict between the regime and the protestors, provoking concerns that the country is slipping toward a civil war. When the social unrest and conflict escalated, the Arab League took a new initiative in December 2011. At first, the Syrian government did not welcome the Arab League Protocol (also known as Peace Plan), arguing that it violates Syria's sovereignty; however, facing increasing pressure both from the region and Western countries, the Syrian government eventually had to accept the deal.

The Protocol allowing Arab observers into the country between Syria and Arab League was signed on December 19th, 2011 in Cairo under Iraqi mediation. It included initiation of talks between opposition and the government, end of violence, withdrawal of Syrian troops from cities and release of the prisoners. While Russia and China welcomed that the Arab League assumed the role of mediator rather than bringing the Syrian issue to the Security Council, the U.S. and European countries pointed out that it was still uncertain who observers will monitor and in which cities they will carry out their observations.

On the other hand, the Syrian opposition rejected the agreement. The Syrian National Council gathered in Tunisia on the same day that Syria and the Arab League signed the protocol. It objected to the agreement and demanded that the international community recognize it as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people; implement a no fly zone; and create a buffer zone in Syria, among other demands.

Another criticism was that observers failed to stop the Syrian regime's violence.

The observer mission in Syria was not tasked with ending the violence but with monitoring whether or not the country is abiding by the Arab League protocol.

In the meeting held on January 22nd in Cairo, the Arab League presented a peace plan to be taken to the United Nations (UN). The plan which was quite similar to the one prepared for Yemen—called on Assad to hand power to his deputy, demanded the establishment of a national unity government within two months, and called for early elections, among other demands.

Arab League's call for peaceful transfer of authority reflects a departure from the League's traditional policy of non-interference. The Arab League—which has historically supported

regimes at the expense of civilian populations—indicated that intervention of the member countries will not only include sanctions but may also result in regime changes.

The draft resolution submitted by Morocco to the UN Security Council demanded that the Syrian regime put an end to the violence, cease arbitrary detention, launch a dialogue process embracing all political groups, and hold free elections. Moreover, it called on Assad to transfer executive power to his vice-president, and it called on UN to take necessary measures to support Arab League efforts to find a political resolution to the crisis.

## **CONCLUSION**

Syria's conflict, now into its third year, has left over 100,000 dead. It has devastated the economy and the country's delicate social fabric. It has caused 5 million Syrians to flee their homes to other places within the country, and driven another 2 million abroad.

The Arab League that for the most part maintained its silence at the initial stages of the Syrian crisis was forced to take an active stance due to the risk of intensifying violence that could spread to surrounding countries.

The League declares that the time has come to call on the world community to bear its responsibility and take the deterrent measure that puts a halt to the tragedy of heinous crimes committed in Syria.

Overcoming disagreements between the UN security council members is needed in order to take the necessary deterring measures against the perpetrators of this crime, whose responsibility falls on the Syrian regime.

Therefor the League subscribes themselves to the endeavor of the Forum for 21. Century to discuss proper measures to reach a mutual understanding.