

The Forum for the 21st century concerning the Syrian civil war

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, the League and the Forum. The League is in high hope of finding and reaching a common understanding among all participating nations and finding a political path out of the crisis.

BACKGROUND

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 League called on Assad to halt the violence, free political prisoners, to open dialogue with the opposition, and to allow observers and international media into the country. The League decided to set up a Syrian Committee to guide the process in coordination with both the Syrian government and the opposition. The Syrian regime failed to open dialogue within the Arab League's prescribed timeline, and forced the Arab League to undertake suspension of Syria's Arab League membership in its extraordinary meeting. 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. 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 and is thus a sign of change in the traditional status-quo oriented policies. The 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.

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 when the Arab League Protocol (also known as Peace Plan) was presented. It

included initiation of peaceful talks between opposition and the government and the League as mediator, end of violence, withdrawal of Syrian troops from cities and the release of the prisoners. 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.

Within the League there are three different positions, the first group of states represents supportive attitude towards oppositions, including supplying arms or financial and political support. The second group reflects reluctant attitude, such as Lebanon or Algeria. Position of the third group stands in the middle, they support aspiration of the people to build democratic vision of the state but the transitional state have to be organized to avoid collapse of the state. Although there are more positions concerning this issue, the main goal is same for all members of the League.

The League proposes bringing all parties together for a conference to negotiate and to find a political path out of this crisis. Its main goal is reaching Geneva II. This means bringing Russia, UN officials, The United States of America and Syrian Parties together and achieving a political solution through a comprehensive agreement between the government and the opposition. It is in the interest of the League to find suitable and sustainable solution that does not benefit any single party, religion or political group, but creates adequate conditions for recovery and creation of peaceful conditions acceptable for all parties.

The League is strongly against any military intervention and believes that this conflict can be solved in a peaceful and rational way. Free and equal election shall decide the future of the country. The League has already taken concrete steps towards democracy in Syria by drafting a plan to pave the way for elections. Therefore we endorse exceedingly the arrangement of free and equal elections, accordingly to cultural and traditional customs. The League strongly recommends the participation of international spotters, including experts from participating parties, who will look after a smooth and fair elections process.

CONCLUSION

Syria's ongoing conflict 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.

The League of Arab States repeats sincere thanks to the Forums' invitation and reaffirms the participation on the conference. The League would like to take this opportunity to express the hope that negotiations will result in a gradual restoration of truce in Syria. We look forward to further cooperation and belief that our discussions will reach an agreement confirmed by a signature of common memorandum. Should you require any supplementary information, please feel free to contact us by providing a written statement.

Deputy of The League of Arab States