

12 October 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Event on “Challenges of Transition in the Arab Region:
Economic and Social Policies in the Region”**

Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, UN DESA,
Mr. Paolo Lembo Director of the UNDP Regional Center in Cairo,
Dr. Hala El Said, Dean, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Elsaid on her assumption of this important post, noting that she shall assume her new responsibilities, after fair and democratic elections. I wish her success.
Ladies and gentlemen,

The President of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, regrets that he could not join you for today's event. As Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly, I am pleased to make the following remarks on his behalf.

Let me express my sincere thanks to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; the UNDP Regional Program in Cairo; and the Centre for Economic and Financial Research, Cairo University, for the invitation to provide some thoughts on the "Challenges of Transition in the Arab World".

I would also congratulate DESA and UNDP on the launch of the book “Economic and Social Development Policies in the Arab World: Looking Forward”, and the great efforts of Professor Dr. Mahmoud Abdulfadeel and the Qatari Government for its contribution, which made the required financing for the book launch available. Without doubt, this book is considered an important and substantive contribution, as the international community considers how to support countries in transition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that we have before us a remarkable moment in the history of the Arab world. The region is undergoing a period of profound change, unlike any since the decolonization era. People across the region are taking action and speaking with voices previously unheard. They are demanding what is rightfully theirs: liberty, dignity, democracy and social justice. These legitimate demands are consistent with the basic principles and objectives of the UN Charter, and international human rights.

New democracies in the region are now in a critical transitional phase. At the fore are vital questions on how to take forward political and economic reforms.

Indeed, this is a moment of significant challenge but- more importantly- of great opportunity.

This is a moment when functioning, efficient, representative governments can be built.

This is a moment when greater accountability, transparency and the rule of law can be institutionalized.

And this is a moment when the rights of women, youth and minorities can be entrenched.

But we also must recognise that democratic transformation needs to be coupled with economic transformation.

Unfortunately, impressive economic growth in the region has not, to date, led to a significant reduction of poverty and inequality. There is a critical need for building more inclusive economies throughout the region: economies that will raise living standards and create sustained job growth. Economies that are geared to the interests of peoples and protected from corrupt practices.

Growth in the region will require, among other things and while reaffirming national ownerships, continued foreign investment in these countries as they transition.

The key question before us is: how can the United Nations best provide support and assistance to Member States in transition?

The UN has a key role to play in mobilizing political will and international support for these countries facing the challenge of transition.

It also has an important role to provide technical support to countries who request it. The United Nations has a long and vast experience in providing capacity-building support, such as electoral assistance and support for effective aid management.

Indeed, we have already witnessed the United Nations' important contribution in supporting democratic change in recent months. The UN has been at the forefront of international efforts to support changes in the Arab world. The UN system expeditiously sent assessment missions to evaluate the needs and offer UN expertise. The UN is on the ground working in Tunisia, Egypt and of course Libya. In Libya, a United Nations Support mission has just been mandated by a Security Council Resolution.

In undertaking the UN's work, it must be recognized that while certain universal values exist, there is no one-size-fits-all model for reform. Each country of course has its own historic, institutional and cultural context that needs to be recognized and respected.

National ownership is key in this respect. I encourage the international community to respond to the needs as presented by the concerned populations, to ensure true ownership and legitimacy going forward.

The United Nations must also be prepared to respond quickly to calls for assistance in the region. Prompt action is required if populations are to see the dividends of their struggle for change.

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

At the United Nations General Assembly in New York last month, many world leaders expressed their strong support for the remarkable shifts taking place across the Arab world. Member States praised the courage and dedication of those who fought for freedom, justice and human rights. And they affirmed their commitment to support the realization of these populations' aspirations.

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, let me express his deep commitment to supporting Member States as they explore new and innovative ways to support this call for a better future and for social justice.

I believe that the United Nations stands ready to continue its support for the region in realizing its aspirations for freedom, development and human rights.

The Arab world has before it a golden opportunity to reclaim its region as a cradle of tolerance, innovation and civilization.

Let us join together to make sure these noble aspirations become an everyday reality – ordinary, not exceptional- for the people of the Arab world.

Thank you.