

17 February 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Special Conference “Transformation in the Arab World and
Russia’s Interests”**

Delivered by Professor Mustapha Tlili, Special Advisor, on behalf of the President of the General Assembly

Distinguished colleagues,
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 here in Moscow.

My name is Mustapha Tlili, I am Special Advisor to the President, and I am pleased to make the following remarks on his behalf.

Let me express my appreciation to Valдай, for organizing this most timely and important conference.

It is fitting that this conference is taking place at this moment, in Russia. Russia has a long history of interaction with the Arab world. Russia has contributed to the region’s development and its prosperity, and to the advancement of Arab nations and peoples. Russia also has a superb corps of experts from academia and diplomacy, with the knowledge and tools to make a solid contribution to this crucial time in the Arab region. I would encourage Russia to use the rich tools at its disposal to support Arab countries in this moment of profound transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that this is an unprecedented moment in Arab history. Shifts are taking place across the region, unlike any seen since the post-decolonization era.

People are speaking out with voices previously unheard, demanding what is rightfully theirs: liberty, dignity, democracy and social justice.

This is truly and inspiring, momentous moment.

But it is also a moment of enormous challenge. The Arab world, and the international community, are facing a major crossroad. How can the calls for liberties, for freedoms, become a true, sustainable reality?

It is my belief that we are moving now into a second stage of the Arab Awakening. Moving from a lyrical phase to a phase of hard work. From dreams to reality.

What is required is effective economic and political reforms.

The building of functioning, efficient, representative governments. The strengthening of accountability, transparency and the rule of law.

And democratic transformation must 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.

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

There is of course, no one-size-fits-all model for reform. Each country has its own historic, institutional and cultural context that needs to be recognized and respected.

As countries begin to undertake their reforms, the UN offers a key role in mobilizing the political will and international support for countries facing transition.

The UN also has an important role in providing technical support to countries who request it.

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.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The story of the Arab Awakening is no doubt close to the hearts of the Russian people. For you, too, went through a period of major revolution. And you know that, beyond the euphoria of freedom is the reality of reconstruction, of establishing a functioning, stable democracy.

Democracy is learning process. It takes time, it takes hard work, and it takes patience. Not all needs and expectations can be satisfied at once.

But if there was ever a moment to seize the day, it is now. 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.