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The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Foreign Minister of Australia
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On Saturday, I stood in Tahrir Square in the middle of Cairo.

This is where the people of Egypt, led by its youth, rose up to bring about fundamental political change.

They stood up in the hope of bringing into being a truly modern democracy in this most ancient of civilisations.

It was humbling to stand in Tahrir Square with students who still bore shrapnel in their flesh, inflicted by those who sought to extinguish their dream for democratic freedom.

It was humbling to sit down and talk with student leaders who had put their lives on the line in pursuit of the most basic of freedoms.

And it was humbling to stand in the place where so many of their fellow students had paid the ultimate price.

In Tahrir Square, I was given one of these – a memorial card carrying the photographs of young people who died before their lives had barely begun, names such as.

- Ahmed
- Hussein
- Mahrous
- Sawy
- Abou Zeid
- Banouna
- Rashed
- Seif Islam
- Bassiouni
- Mariam
- Sally

And now Egypt begins the long, hard road to democracy.

As does Tunisia.

While in Libya, a bloody struggle continues against a regime that defies all civilized norms.

When we gather here in Geneva as a community of nations, we are haunted by history.

It was in this city that the peoples of the world first gathered as a League of Nations, only to see this first experiment in the parliament of human kind collapse in the carnage of war.

And so we tried again.

And so was born these United Nations.

One of the fundamental compacts of the United Nations, from its earliest years, was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration holds that all peoples have the right to freedom of opinion; freedom of expression; freedom of peaceful assembly and association; an adequate standard of living; the right to take part in the government of their countries, either directly or through freely chosen representatives; and that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, and that this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, that these should be by universal and equal suffrage and that they be held by secret vote.

These 'universal' rights, first laid out in 1948, are the same rights now sought by the young people of Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.

Some have argued that these rights are only applicable to particular cultures, particular societies, and at a particular point in history.

That is not what the Universal Declaration says.

That is not what we in Australia believe.

That is not what the people across the Arab world are saying.

The world's eyes are now turned to Libya, where the same cry for freedom from political oppression rings out across the world.

Once again, people, both young and old, are paying for this with their lives.

A desperate regime is using the most brutal forms of violence against its civilian population as a tool for crude, political survival.

And so the peoples of the world have rightly turned to these United Nations to ask what now must be done.

The truth is, our history in the handling of these matters in times past has been poor.

We think of Rwanda.

We think of Srebrenica.

We think of Darfur.

Time after time we have seen one regime after another fail in their most fundamental responsibility to protect their civilian populations.

And so we, the international community, agreed at the World Summit in 2005 to embrace an international principle entitled 'the responsibility to protect'.

In this context, I would acknowledge the contribution of my distinguished Australian predecessor, former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, and his contribution to the R2P report of 2001, as co-chair of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.

In times past, the Security Council focused primarily on armed conflicts.

But now we have seen an increasing tendency on the part of the Security Council to address such atrocities, to recognize the inherent threat such situations pose to international peace and security.

We have seen the birth of the International Criminal Court.

And we have seen the adoption of the international principle of R2P.

As a community of nations, we have agreed that we will act to prevent and respond to genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

Last week, I wrote to the President of the Security Council, requesting that Libya be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Over the weekend we saw UN Security Resolution 1970, which invoked both the responsibility to protect and referred the situation in Libya to the International Criminal Court.

While the Security Council has recognised the R2P principle in earlier resolutions, the Security Council's resolution on Libya is the first time the Security Council has taken punitive action against a country based on recognition of that country's responsibility to protect its population.

As delegates would know, there had been different views within the Council as to this course of action.

The outcome was aided by the strong and decisive leadership shown by the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the African Union and Libya's own representatives on the Council speaking with one voice against the regime's violent suppression of its people.

These actions of the Security Council have been accompanied by the decisions of the Human Rights Council: the recommendation to suspend Libya from this Council; together with the decision to convene an international commission of inquiry to establish the nature and extent of human rights abuses in Libya.

Tomorrow Australia will voice its support in the General Assembly for this Council's recommendation to suspend Libya from the Human Rights Council.

We will do so because what this Council has done is right – and seen as such by the peoples of the world.

The suffering continues today on the streets of Tripoli, fewer than a thousand miles to our south, as we meet in these comfortable surrounds in Geneva.

That is why the international community must remain seized of its responsibilities in the critical days that lie ahead.

The Human Rights Council called on all states to provide humanitarian assistance to the peoples of Libya during their trials – and we in Australia will play our part through an immediate contribution to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

We stand ready to do more.

Australia also believes that the Security Council should embrace a no-fly zone to help protect the Libyan people from the violence they have already experienced from units of the Libyan airforce.

Furthermore, the Security Council must keep all other options on the table to deal with unfolding events in Libya.

Let us remember Guernica.

For the sake of the Libyan people, the people of the world are saying to Ghaddafi – just go.

We in Australia are a middle power with global interests.

Our interests and our values are also reflected in what we call good international citizenship – how we build, sustain and enhance the global and regional rules-based order.

And this order embraces the full spectrum of our international engagements – arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation; climate change; economic development; trade liberalisation; humanitarian assistance and – critical to our deliberations today – the maintenance and enhancement of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Consistent with these principles, Australia embraces fully its responsibilities under the Millennium Development Goals and consistent with this commitment, we have doubled our overseas development assistance budget over the last five years and we will double it again over the next five.

We are committed to universal education for all the human family; programs to reduce radically child and maternal mortality; programs to enhance food security through both dry land and tropical agriculture research; programs to support the 650 million members of humanity who are not only among the world's poor, but are in fact the poorest of the poor because they also suffer from disabilities; and equally we are committed to programs to close the global gender gap by enhancing the opportunity of women and girls in all societies.

The Government which I led as Prime Minister also overturned the previous Australian Government's opposition to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Since then, other governments have also announced their support for the Declaration.

We have also sought to reflect these principles in our dealings with Australia's own Indigenous peoples.

Again as Prime Minister of Australia, I tendered a formal apology in the Australian Parliament to Australia's indigenous peoples for the centuries of oppression which the first Australians had experienced from European settlers.

Words, however, are not enough.

That is why we have equally embraced a decades-long program entitled 'Closing the Gap' which seeks to bridge the social, economic and employment divide between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

We have much more still to do.

This Human Rights Council is charged with an important mandate.

As the hopes contained in the Universal Declaration are echoed across the world, and where these hopes find themselves the subject of violent suppression, the mandate of this Council requires it to stand up and be counted.

This will never be easy.

It will always be hard.

Each delegate here is conscious of the complexities of each case which may come before it – conscious of different national conditions at any given time.

But let us never allow our preoccupations with ‘political complexity’ to blind us from our core responsibilities when the case is so clear.

For these are not just the aspirations of one civilizational tradition in our human family.

They are reflected in all.

As we see in the writings of the famous Arab poet Kahlil Gibran: ‘Life without freedom is like a body without a soul...’

I thank the Council.