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Ambassador Rice on U.N. General Assembly Libya Resolution

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As Delivered

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the UNGA Libya Resolution, March 1, 2011

Mr. President, for the first time ever, the General Assembly has suspended a member of the Human Rights Council. This is a harsh rebuke — but one that Libya's leaders have brought down upon themselves.

The United States continues to be appalled by the situation in Libya, and our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the Libyans who have been killed. The General Assembly has come together to speak with one voice to Libya's unrepentant rulers. This unprecedented action sends another clear warning to Mr. Qadhafi and those who still stand by him: they must stop the killing. When the only way a leader can cling to power is by grossly and systematically violating his own people's human rights, he has lost any legitimacy to rule. He must go, and he must go now.

The protests in Libya are being driven by the people of Libya. This is about the universal human rights of the Libyan people and all people—and about a regime that has failed to meet its responsibility to protect its own population. The United States was pleased to co-sponsor this resolution along with partners from all regions of the world, which underscores the universality of this decision and the depth of our commitment to the human rights we all share.

Mr. President, I must add that the United States utterly rejects the willful and ugly distortion by the Venezuelan delegation of U.S. policy and posture. At a time when this assembly is acting in unison in support of the Libyan people, it is shameful that one member state, whose own reprehensible record speaks for itself, would manipulate this occasion to spread lies, foster fear, and sow hate.

The General Assembly, by contrast, today has acted in the noblest traditions of the United Nations — and made it clear that governments that turn their guns on their own people have no place on the Human Rights Council. Membership on the Human Rights Council should be earned through respect for human rights, and not accorded to those who abuse them. We

hope that we can work together to build on today's united, bold, and principled action to defend universal human rights across the United Nations system.

We applaud the members of the General Assembly for taking this historic decision.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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Remarks of Secretary Clinton at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, February 28, 2011



Human Rights Council, Geneva. (File Photo)

February 28, 2011

For Immediate Release

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman**

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

**At the Human Rights Council
Geneva, Switzerland**

**Palais des Nations
Geneva, Switzerland**

SECRETARY CLINTON: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. President, and I want to thank the High Commissioner and all my colleagues for their strong words here today, as well as during the special session on Friday.

Today the world's eyes are fixed on Libya. We have seen Colonel Qadhafi's security forces open fire on peaceful protestors again and again. They have used heavy weapons on unarmed civilians. Mercenaries and thugs have been turned loose to attack demonstrators. There are reports of soldiers executed for refusing to turn their guns on their fellow citizens, of indiscriminate killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture.

Colonel Qadhafi and those around him must be held accountable for these acts, which violate international legal obligations and common decency. Through their actions, they have lost the legitimacy to govern. And the people of Libya have made themselves clear: It is time for Qadhafi to go – now, without further violence or delay.

The international community is speaking with one voice and our message is unmistakable. These violations of universal rights are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This Council took an important first step toward accountability on Friday by establishing an independent commission of inquiry.

On Saturday in New York, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution imposing an arms embargo on Libya, freezing the assets of key human rights violators and other members of the Qadhafi family, and referring the Libyan case to the International Criminal Court.

Tomorrow, the UN General Assembly should vote to accept the recommendation to suspend the Qadhafi government's participation here in the Human Rights Council. Governments that turn their guns on their own people have no place in this chamber.

The Arab League deserves our praise as the first multilateral organization to suspend Libya's membership — despite the fact that Libya was serving as the Arab League Chair. We hope to see our friends in the African Union follow suit.

We all need to work together on further steps to hold the Qadhafi government accountable, provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, and support the Libyan people as they pursue a transition to democracy. Today, I've had the privilege of consulting with a wide range of colleagues here in Geneva and President Obama is meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Washington. We will continue coordinating closely with our allies and partners.

The United States has already imposed travel restrictions and financial sanctions on Qadhafi and senior Libyan officials. We have frozen assets to ensure that they are preserved for the Libyan people. And we have halted our very limited defense trade with Libya. We are working with the United Nations, partners, allies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, and other NGOs to set up a robust humanitarian response to this crisis.

As we move forward on these fronts, we will continue to explore all possible options for action. As we have said, nothing is off the table so long as the Libyan Government continues to threaten and kill Libyans.

Ultimately, the people of Libya themselves will be the ones to chart their own destiny and shape their own new government. They are now braving the dictator's bullets and putting their lives on the line to enjoy the freedoms that are the birthright of every man, woman, and child on earth. Like their neighbors in Tunisia and Egypt, they are asserting their rights and claiming their future.

Now, while the circumstances in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya are each unique, in every case the demand for change has come from within, with people calling for greater civil liberties, economic opportunities' and a stake in the governance of their own societies.

And the world has been inspired by their courage and their determination. We see in their struggles a universal yearning for dignity and respect. And they remind us that the power of human dignity is always underestimated until the day it finally prevails.

This moment belongs to the people, particularly the young people, of the Middle East. On behalf of President Obama and the American people, let me say that we are inspired by what you are doing and heartened by what it means for your future. The United States supports orderly, peaceful, and irreversible transitions to real democracies that deliver results for their citizens.

On this our values and interests converge. Because supporting these transitions is not simply a matter of ideals. It is also a strategic imperative. Without meaningful steps toward representative, accountable, and transparent governance and open economies, the gap between people and their leaders will only grow, and instability will deepen. What might have been possible in the 20th century, with new technologies and the power that people now have to connect, is no longer possible.

And to hang on to systems that are unaccountable and that do not respond to the legitimate needs of one's people poses a danger, not only a danger to leaders but a danger to all of our interests. By contrast, history has shown that democracies tend to be more stable, more peaceful, and ultimately more prosperous.

Democratic change must grow from within. It cannot be implanted from the outside. And let me be among the first of many to say the West certainly does not have all of the answers. The first steps of change have come quickly and dramatically. It is, however,

proving tragically difficult in Libya. In other nations, change is likely to be more deliberate and methodical. In all cases, the United States will support citizens and governments as they work for progress.

We are well aware of the challenges that come with these kinds of transitions. You cannot create jobs or economic opportunities overnight. These changes can be chaotic. And in the short term, there will be new voices and political competitions emerging for the first time. And as history has shown, these new births of democracy, of freedom, of human rights, can be derailed by autocrats who use violence, deception, and rigged elections to stay in power or to advance an undemocratic agenda. But like Colonel Qadhafi, leaders who deny their people freedom and opportunity will, in the end, fuel the very instability they fear.

So the process of transition must be protected from anti-democratic influences from wherever they come. Political participation must be open to all people across the spectrum who reject violence, uphold equality, and agree to play by the rules of democracy. Those who refuse should not be allowed to subvert the aspirations of the people. And leaders cannot claim democratic legitimacy if they abandon these principles once they are in power.

Free and fair elections are essential to building and maintaining democracy, but elections alone are not sufficient. Sustainable democracies are built on strong institutions, including an independent judiciary that promotes the rule of law and helps ensure official accountability and transparency, and stands against corruption.

Recent days have underscored the importance of the freedom of expression, whether it's in the public square, through the press, or on the internet. Brave journalists have broadcast images of repression around the world, and the young people of Tunisia and Egypt have shown everyone what a force for democracy, the open exchange of ideas, can be.

A vibrant civil society is also an indispensable building block of democracy. And not only in the Middle East but around the world, citizen activists and civic organizations are emerging as strong voices for progress. They help develop solutions to tough problems. They hold governments accountable. They empower and protect women and minorities. The United States is committed to broadening our own engagement with civil society, and we urge leader and governments to treat civil society, as partners, not adversaries.

There also must be for transitions to thrive a commitment to make economic opportunity available to all. Human rights, democracy, and development are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. We have seen how inequity and lack of economic opportunities drive people into the streets. So to earn the confidence of one's own people, governments have to deliver on the promise of improved lives.

There is no doubt that the most important goal for most people in the world today is a decent life for themselves and their families. At the very least, that must be the goal that

we deliver on. It is also particularly important that women and minorities have access to opportunity and participation. Nations cannot flourish if half their population is consigned to the margins or denied their rights. We have seen how women play a vital role in driving social and economic progress when they are accorded their rights and afforded equal opportunity. And in so doing, they lift up not only themselves but their families and their societies.

These are not Western principles or American ideals. They are truly universal, lessons learned by people all over the world who have made the difficult transition to sustainable democracy. And as we look at what's happening now in the Middle East, of course those changes will be shaped by local circumstances and led by local leaders. And people themselves will determine whether or not the change has worked. But universal principles will be important touchstones along the way.

That is why, as we watch what is happening in Egypt, we hope that there will be a broad array of opposition voices and representatives to ensure that the reform process is inclusive. We want to see concrete steps taken, including enacting constitutional reforms and releasing political detainees and lifting the state of emergency. The United States stands ready to assist, however appropriate, especially through economic assistance that helps promote reform and create greater opportunity.

In Tunisia, we welcome the interim leadership's efforts to form an inclusive, broad-based government and its desire to hold elections as soon as possible. And we were heartened to hear this morning from Tunisia's state secretary for foreign affairs that it will welcome the opening of a UN human rights office, and open its doors to all UN special rapporteurs. We are supporting the Tunisian people on this long and difficult road ahead. And as other important partners such as Jordan and Bahrain take steps – sometimes very difficult steps – to open their political space, we will stand behind them and support their efforts because we are convinced that they will help advance all of our shared interests.

But now, there is an alternative vision for the future of the region that only promises more frustration and discord. Extremists and rejectionists across the Middle East argue that they are the ones who champion the rights of the downtrodden. For decades, they have claimed that the only way to achieve change is through violence and conflict. But all they have accomplished is to undermine peace and progress. The success of peaceful protests has discredited the extremists and exposed their bankrupt arguments.

Iran, for example, has consistently pursued policies of violence abroad and tyranny at home. In Tehran, security forces have beaten, detained, and in several recent cases killed peaceful protesters even as Iran's president has made a show of denouncing the violence in Libya. Iranian authorities have targeted human rights defenders and political activists, ex-government officials and their families, clerics and their children, student leaders and their professors, as well as journalists and bloggers.

Last week, the United States imposed new sanctions on Iranian officials for serious human rights abuses. Here at the Human Rights Council, we are proud to be working

with Sweden and other partners to establish a special rapporteur on Iran. Its mandate would be to investigate and report on abuses in Iran, and to speak out when the government there does not meet its human rights obligations. Iranian human rights advocates have demanded this step to raise international pressure on their government.

This will be a seminal moment for this Council, and a test of our ability to work together to advance the goals that it represents. Indeed, every member of this Council should ask him or herself a simple question: Why do people have the right to live free from fear in Tripoli but not Tehran? The denial of human dignity in Iran is an outrage that deserves the condemnation of all who speak out for freedom and justice.

The Human Rights Council was founded because the international community has a **responsibility to protect** universal rights and to hold violators accountable, both in fast-breaking emergencies such as Libya and Cote d'Ivoire, and in slow motion tragedies of chronic abuse, such as Burma and North Korea. We saw this Council at its best on Friday, when it took decisive action on Libya. We saw it in December's Special Session on Cote d'Ivoire, where the situation is increasingly dire and there's been a large spike in violence. We must continue sending a strong message to Laurent Gbagbo that his actions are unacceptable, and the international community must keep up the pressure.

Last fall, this Council also took the important decision to create a Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Assembly and Association, and we have likewise seen a strengthening in the Council's approach to freedom of expression. But too often, still, we are not seeing a serious enough response, to use this institution to advance human rights. Sometimes, the Council does not act, and its integrity is undermined because it defers to regional relations, diplomatic niceties, and cynical politics. Membership on this Council should be earned through respect for human rights. That is the standard laid out by the General Assembly. This Council's predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, lost its credibility in part because Libya was allowed to serve as its president. It should not take bloodshed for us to agree that such regimes have no place here.

And I must add, the structural bias against Israel – including a standing agenda item for Israel, whereas all other countries are treated under a common item – is wrong. And it undermines the important work we are trying to do together. As member states, we can take this Council in a better, stronger direction.

In 2009, the United States joined the Human Rights Council because President Obama and I believed we could make a difference by working with you on the inside rather than standing on the outside merely as a critic. And over the past 18 months, we have worked together. We've reached across regional lines in an attempt to overcome what hobbles this country[i] more than anything else, our divisions as member states. The unity of purpose we have forged with respect to Libya offers us an opportunity to continue that progress.

As we look ahead, and as the Council completes a review of its own operations, we hope to help set a new agenda, based on three principles. First, the Council must have the

capacity to respond to emergencies in real time. And it must demonstrate clearly that it possesses the will to address gross abuses, hold violators accountable, and work with governments, citizens, and civil society organizations genuinely committed to reform.

Second, the Council must apply a single standard to all countries based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It cannot continue to single out and devote disproportionate attention to any one country.

And third, the Council needs to abandon tired rhetorical debates and focus instead on making tangible improvements in people's lives.

For example, in this session we have an opportunity to move beyond a decade-long debate over whether insults to religion should be banned or criminalized. It is time to overcome the false divide that pits religious sensitivities against freedom of expression and pursue a new approach based on concrete steps to fight intolerance wherever it occurs.

Together, we can and must help this Council live up to its mission and ensure that it plays a constructive role in the days and months ahead. We will face new problems and new challenges, but if we have a firm foundation rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we will chart a steady course.

Make no mistake, this popular wave for reform is spreading, not receding. Each country is unique, but many of the concerns that drove people into the streets and squares of the Middle East are shared by citizens in other parts of the world. Too many governments are hobbled by corruption and fearful of change. Too many young people cannot find jobs or opportunities. Their prospects are shaped more by who they know than by what they know or what they can dream. But it is not my mother's or even my world any more. What has happened with new technologies of the 21st century means that young people know everything that is going on everywhere, and they no longer will tolerate a status quo that blocks their aspirations.

Young people in the Middle East have inspired millions around the world, and we celebrate what some are rightly calling the Arab Spring. This is a hopeful season for all humanity because the cause of human rights and human dignity belongs to us all.

So for leaders on every continent, the choice becomes clearer day by day: Embrace your people's aspirations, have confidence in their potential, help them seize it, or they will lose confidence in you.

Those of you who were here on Friday, and many of us watching on our television screens saw the Libyan representative renounce Qadhafi's violent rule. He said, "Young people in my country today are with their blood writing a new chapter in the history of struggle and resistance. We in the Libyan mission have categorically decided to serve as representatives of the Libyan people and their free will."

This is the call we should heed. This is a time for action. Now is the opportunity for us to support all who are willing to stand up on behalf of the rights we claim to cherish. So let us do that and let us do it with the sounds of the young people from the streets of Tripoli to the markets of Tunis and the squares of Cairo echoing in our ears. Thank you very much.

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Foreign Secretary attends UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

28 February 2011

"This is the time for us to show that we utterly condemn the actions of the Libyan Government" said Foreign Secretary William Hague at the UN Human Rights Council today.



Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council the Foreign Secretary said:

"Last week the council spoke with one voice to affirm the universal rights of people in Libya and to condemn the gross and systematic violations of those rights by the Libyan authorities, including the use of heavy weaponry against civilians, the deaths of women and children and cold blooded incitement to violence.

The resolution we agreed, announcing an independent international commission of inquiry for Libya, shows the council working as it was intended to do. Indeed the unanimous response to the crisis in Libya here in the Human Rights Council and at the United Nations Security Council is nothing short of remarkable. The international community came together in a way it has not done before, setting aside differences in the face of a challenge to the very notion of what we

instinctively regard as the basic rights of humankind; the right to be free from terror and oppression, the right to life and the right to raise, gather and express views without the dread of violent retribution.

Today we have signalled that crimes will not be condoned, will not go unpunished, will not be forgotten and this is a warning to anyone contemplating the abuse of human rights in Libya or in any other country; stay your hand; there will be a day of reckoning and the reach of international justice can be long.

We must now maintain the momentum we have attained to ensure there can be no impunity for crimes committed in Libya and to help bring about an immediate end to the violence.

Mr President, no member state has ever been suspended from the council before and it is not a decision that we should take lightly. However this is the time for us to show that we utterly condemn the actions of the Libyan Government. A regime that has failed so shamefully in its responsibility to its people and that has been referred to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court should not be allowed to sit on the Human Rights Council. We urge our fellow UN member states to support the Draft General Assembly Resolution that will be debated in New York this week.

We must also be vigilant about the potential humanitarian crisis which could develop in Libya. The full scale of the need is not yet clear but where there is need and where we can meet that need Britain will act, and Britain's Department for International Development is already on the ground in neighbouring countries and is ready to assist.

As others have already signalled for their countries the United Kingdom will also support a resolution in the, on the human rights situation in Iran, which would establish a special rapporteur.

Historic events are unfolding in the Middle East; millions of citizens are demanding their rights and look to the international community for support. We have a responsibility to encourage governments to meet the legitimate demands of their people and where necessary to protect the rights of their people.

It is a moment of great opportunity in the Middle East. If change and development can be achieved peacefully it will be the greatest advance in world

affairs since Central and Eastern Europe changed so dramatically twenty years ago and many of their countries entered the European Union. If instead violence takes hold the risks for human rights and international security will be grave. We must support those working peacefully for more open societies and economic reform in the Middle East so that in the months to come we see better observance of human rights across the region. This should include a particular emphasis on the economic and social empowerment of women.

Respect for human rights rests on foundations that have to be built over time; strong institutions, responsible and accountable government, a free press, the rule of law and equal rights for men and women. The United Kingdom stands ready to lend its support and expertise to those countries looking to develop in this way.

I would like to thank the High Commissioner for her tireless work in the this area, in particular her prompt despatch of a rapid reaction team to Tunisia and her commitment to send a human rights mission to Egypt. I would also like to commend the Government of Tunisia for pledging to sign major UN human rights treaties, and the Egyptian Government's commitment to oversee the transition to civilian democratic governance. Both have made important steps in their reform programmes but there is still a vast amount to do. The expectations of the Tunisian and Egyptian people are high, momentum on reform needs to be maintained so people know their governments are serious about change. During this time of unrest it is important that the Human Rights Council shows strong leadership, making it clear that human rights abuses are unacceptable, no matter the context.

Finally we believe three things are necessary for the council to operate effectively now and in the future. It should use independent experts and structures and work closely with civil society and national human rights institutions. Secondly we should maintain a constructive dialogue to help meet our obligations which is why the universal period review has the potential to be such a valuable process. And thirdly, where states fail to meet these obligations the UN, including this council, should act to address violations as they occur. We will continue to champion the independence of the OHCHR so that the High Commissioner and her office are able to continue their valuable work.

We all have a common interest in a council better able to fulfil its mandate and to champion the rights and freedoms on which our collective security and mutual

prosperity depend. Only an effective human rights council will have credibility with the people whose rights we as states are obliged to protect and will be able to rise to the challenge of the extraordinary times in which we are living.

<http://ukingermany.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=558545982>