

## END OF SOMMARUGA'S CHAIRMANSHIP

### Foundation for the Future

Amman, December 7th 2011

Statement by Cornelio Sommaruga  
Chairman of the Board of Directors

DEAR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

The situation in the Region has evolved since our last meeting one year ago in a partly dramatic way. Permit me, at the eve of my farewell from my present position in the Foundation, to share with you **some reflections** dictated by my personal observation of the Arab scene and the events taking place in the last twelve-month.

The Arab world is experiencing seismic shifts. Throughout these demonstrations one theme has been constant: **people are yearning for change.** Most are committed to a vision that is, at once, democratic and indigenous. The region is witnessing the vitality that comes from a deep sense of power in ordinary people's ability to stand together, making the best use of modern electronic devices. The signals are clear. **People at the grassroots levels are coming together to create a more fair, just and peaceful world, not waiting for the solutions to come from the top.**

We can however not ignore – as much rejoicing this evolution is, particularly for us devoted to democracy – that we have witnessed, and are still witnessing, a number of **serious violations of human rights, particularly from previous and present authorities in most, if not in all, countries of North-Africa and the Middle East.** In Libya there also were severe violations of International Humanitarian Law. Many non-armed civilians demonstrating with a substantial and realistic message have been injured and killed in these countries. *I wish to express here for them and their next of skin compassion and solidarity.*

In all our MENA countries one has to count with **great disparities in governance and the population – despite the unique language *Arabic*: the religious factor** first, not only constant tensions between Christians and Muslims, but also the historical division between Sunni and Shia Muslims and even the Khasidjitas in Oman; this religious factor has often created situations where the supreme ruler (as in Syria and Bahrain) pertains to the minority, respectively Alouite and Sunni; the **tribes factor**, as in Libya (and elsewhere), with sometimes difficult relations among them; the **economic factor** with enormous disparities of living conditions between rural/nomad populations, cities proletariat, trade customers, bankers and oil-sheiks; the

**immigration factor** of foreign workers (up to 75% of the population e.g. in Qatar), not necessarily well treated, but happy to transfer most of their modest revenues to their poor families generally in Asia; the **political factor** with constitutional monarchies (as Morocco and Jordan), absolute monarchies as in most of the Gulf states, unique party republic as Algeria, and constitutional democracies with the search of equilibrium among important groups of population (as in Iraq), or on the basis of an agreement of partition of power on religious grounds (as in Lebanon); and indeed other factors difficult to describe also because the **transition is in full evolution** (as in Tunisia and hopefully soon in Egypt, Yemen and Syria). Not to forget also the influence and interference from powerful neighbors in the one or other fellow state.

You may wonder why, am I making the lesson to you, Dear Colleagues, very involved and aware of the present situation here? I simply – as I said - **would feel my responsibility as Chairman of the Board, not to hide my own reflections in these particular circumstances.**

The present turmoil is indeed full of **unpredictability**. Arab countries will have individually to choose their suitable governance, with **hopefully limited influence from outside**. Huge investments will have to be realized

for reconstruction, for restoring viable economies, create employment and give people a sense of hope.

I believe that too often one is **confounding democracy with governance**. The first refers to the form and political structure, the second is larger, because it touches the form as well as the substance. There may be democracies without good governance, but no good governance is possible without credible democracy that is to say without clear transparency of the behavior of authorities in respect to citizens, who will have to enjoy **generally recognized human rights, including indeed women empowerment**. Democracy includes traditions and values. Elections are one of several components of this process. They are not necessarily an element of stability and of unity, but on the contrary often of division, because there are winners and losers.

Arab peoples, after having been subject to the Ottoman/Turkish domination, then to colonization, may now for the first time have after long **the possibility to take their destiny in hands**. It will be important indeed **not to neglect the Islamic values** that are in fact very present in the general conscience. After having experienced foreign ideologies: nationalism, liberalism and socialism, that have all stranded, countries of the MENA region will have to concentrate on the return to sound

sources, what I believe would be a moderate Islam. Turkey and possibly also Malaysia are good examples.

Speaking of the Region we cannot forget **the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**. Everybody is aware of the deep sentiment of injustice and frustration. Arab territories are occupied since 1967; severe suffering on both sides of the demarcation line is daily present with often-lethal casualties. **Israel does not respect the UN Charter, neither the Geneva Conventions**. Violations of international law are often rightly denounced: collective punishment against a democratic elected authority, bombing of civilian population (as in Gaza), war weapons used against non-armed civilians demonstrators (as during intifada). And indeed the double standard policy of Western Governments not actively acting concretely against this behavior is perceived by Arab public opinion as an evident hostility against them.

It is now time to eventually find a solution, under pressure of the *quartet*, mainly the US. There can be no excuses – American elections for example – and the *Geneva Initiative* of 2003 and the *Arab League Proposal* of 2002 already indicate the way. This dynamic is of great urgency; **it is an historical opportunity because of the so-called “Arab spring” that calls for immediate action**, on the one side to use the *movement of*

*indignity's* that has timidly reached Israel and on the other side not to jeopardize the revolutionary and post revolutionary period in North Africa, the Gulf countries and Syria.

As to Libya, I have a personal remark to add. As one of the drafter of the *Responsibility to Protect* Report of the ICISS of 2001 I deplore the misuse made by the UN of this term and concept of action. Too many points have been left open both in the prevention before taking the decision by the Security Council as well as in the implementation of Resolution 1973 with too many dysfunctions. The civilian population to be protected has been the one largely affected by the armed operations. Furthermore the way of eliminating the Libyan main ruler – so criminal he may have been – is absolutely unacceptable, as was the elimination of Bin Laden in another context; **national and international criminal justice has to be used also in such cases.**

Yet the identity-based conflicts, reinforced by pained memories are closing the windows of opportunity in the region. This is the time to bring divided people within teetering states together to overcome old antagonism and hatred, to rid themselves of oppressive hatreds so that one can create new ways to build the sustainable and peaceful world that all deserve. This may be a new task of

our Foundation in order to cope with the evolution of societies in the Region.

Having said all that, I would now like to proceed on our Agenda, without expressing before my and our appreciation for great and good work done since the last Board meeting one year ago in delicate circumstances. Congratulations to our President and all the staff of the Foundation for the Future in Amman.

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