Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle to the UN Security Council: Threats to international peace and security: Change in the Middle East: challenges and opportunities for peace and security

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-- Translation of advance text --

Thank you Mr. President.

And thank you, Secretary-General, for your briefing.

Change has come to the Arab world. It has come because the peoples in the region, especially the youth, have stood up for freedom, participation and dignity.

I want to congratulate the peoples of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya as well as those of Morocco, Yemen and Jordan on the progress they have made, each in their own way.

The Arab League has responded to calls for reform. We applaud the constructive role it has played over the past 12 months.

The changes in the Arab World reflect a beginning globalisation of values. People all over the world are demanding their universal human rights. The values of the United Nations are gaining ground.

We are still only at the beginning. But in the long term all the people of the region will benefit. And so will we, as their neighbours in the European Union. And as neighbours we are ready to help.

Germany took an early decision to assist the transition countries. Our support is guided by three principles. First, reform must come from within. But we stand ready to support countries which choose democratic change. Second, no two countries in the Arab world are alike. Each country must choose its own path and find its own pace. Finally, we know that the road to democracy is not linear. It is a difficult passage which requires patience and persistence.

Liberty and democracy need a promising economic perspective. We have offered “transformation partnerships” to all countries in question. We stand ready to support them

with know-how, investments and open markets in Europe. A focus of our international support should be on education. A good education for the youth is key for any future economic success.

Many in the West fear the rise of political Islam. But the notion that Islam and democracy are incompatible is wrong. We have engaged in dialogue with democratic Islamic parties.

We are ready to respect cultural traditions. At the same time we are looking for clear commitments to human rights and the rule of law, to a pluralistic society, to respect for minorities, to religious tolerance and to domestic and external peace. Women have been a driving force for change in the region. We urge all partners in transition to strengthen their rights.

The changes in the region have made it even more urgent to make progress towards a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. I therefore welcome the meeting of the Quartet principals today. All parties must do everything to ease tensions and to avoid an escalation on the ground. I am deeply worried about the flare-up of violence around Gaza. The shelling with rockets of innocent people is unacceptable and must stop.

The Iranian nuclear program challenges the stability of the region and the international non-proliferation regime. A nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable.

The E3+3 and Iran have expressed their willingness to engage in talks. We want and we work for a political and diplomatic solution. There is still time for diplomacy. Irrespective of the nuclear issue, we will not forget how the Iranian regime has failed to respond the legitimate demands of its people.

In Yemen, the election of President Hadi marks an important milestone in the political transition. I visited Sanaa two days ago. Yemen continues to face tremendous challenges. But it is in a much better situation today than it was a year ago. Today, there is a genuine chance to achieve national reconciliation. The people of Yemen deserve our full support.

We are all grateful for the peaceful transfer of power. The Gulf Cooperation Council played a key role. So did the Security Council and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. These joint efforts made the Yemeni-led transition process possible. In many regards, the case of Yemen may serve as a model for political transition, for conflict resolution for this Council.

This week marks the anniversary of the beginning of peaceful protests in Syria. From the start Germany has called for the Security Council to act.

There has been much discussion on Syria in this room. But the Council has failed to live up to its responsibility. Peaceful protest has been put down with horrific violence and murder.

Among the 8.000 dead there are hundreds of children. This violence must end, and it must end now.

We have been watching with admiration the growing number of Syrians who risk limb and life every day for a better future. The people in Syria overcome fear every day in the face of overwhelming repression and violence. The source of their courage is both hope and despair. Let us give them here in the Security Council more reason for hope than for despair.

Germany has been working tirelessly for a political solution. We must prevent a further escalation. Too much time has been wasted.

We see three priorities. First, an end to violence. Second, immediate and unhindered access for humanitarian aid. Third, a process of peaceful transition, led by Syrians and based on the decisions of the Arab League.

It is my firm conviction that only the Syrian people themselves can decide their future. They have been expressing their will throughout the last 12 months. And no one can doubt their desire for change. We extend our hand to all those working for peaceful and democratic change, in particular the Syrian National Council. In a new Syria, all Syrians must be able to enjoy their full rights regardless of affiliation, ethnicity, belief or gender.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Arab League, Joint Envoy Kofi Annan, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Pillay, and Mrs. Amos for their untiring efforts. Germany will continue to push for action - in this Council, in other

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bodies, in the European Union and with like-minded partners in the “Friends of the Syrian People”.

Sending a strong signal and taking effective action is what we owe to the people of Syria. And it is the only way this Council can live up to our responsibility under the Charter.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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