Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary in Egypt

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Foreign Secretary William Hague, who is currently visiting Egypt, held a press conference with the Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil El-Araby. The Foreign Secretary spoke about Egypt, Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda and international terrorism, Syria, Libya, and Israel and Palestine.

The Foreign Secretary said:

“It is a pleasure to be here in Cairo, to show the United Kingdom’s support for what the people of Egypt have achieved in the last three months and for all the work that lies ahead to secure a democratic and peaceful future for this great country.

There could not be a greater contrast between peaceful change here, and the destructive and evil-minded campaign of terror waged by Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda over the last ten years.

The struggle against international terrorism will continue and we must and will redouble our efforts to disrupt and deter it in Afghanistan, Pakistan and around the world. But alongside that we must be bold and ambitious in helping people of this region - in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya and across the Middle East - who want a future free from terrorism and all forms of oppression, who stand for opportunity, hope, progress and tolerance, and that is why I am here in Egypt today.

The success of the Arab Spring will be judged very heavily by what happens here. People look to Egypt to lead the way and build on what has already been achieved: To make the irrevocable transition from revolution to reform; to build a pluralist non-sectarian government that can meet the aspirations and command the respect of all Egyptians; and to set a clear timetable for elections in which all groups can participate and stand an equal chance of success.

This will require steps to build democratic institutions and political parties, to protect human rights including freedom of worship that protects people’s right to practice their faith safe from fear of attacks, and economic reform.

In my meetings today with Field Marshal Tantawi, Prime Minister Sharaf and the Foreign Minister, I have encouraged our Egyptian friends to be bold and ambitious in the coming

months.

I repeated Britain's offer of bilateral assistance to the people of Egypt, under our Arab Partnership Initiative, in a whole range of areas - including education, building civil society, enforcing the rule of law and tackling corruption. I underlined that this also includes steps that we have taken to freeze the assets of former regime members. This is in addition to the bold and generous offer of support which we hope the EU will make. We urge the European Union radically to transform its Neighbourhood Policy, using its economic magnetism to support free and more prosperous societies in this region. Britain will also offer advice and influence to help mobilise international support to stabilise the Egyptian economy and promote investment.

The people of Egypt have sent a message to the rest of the region that reform can be peaceful. We look to them now to show that it can be successful.

The Foreign Minister and I have also discussed the grave and unacceptable situation in Syria. Britain has supported collective, concrete action this week in the form of an EU arms embargo and further work on targeted sanctions on Syria, alongside the strong resolution passed by the UN Human Rights Council launching an investigation into human rights abuses. And today we have begun to consult with our partners in New York about action at the UN Security Council. If the Syrian Government does not immediately stop the violence, the killing and the repression, we will work with other countries to ensure that those responsible are held personally to account. What the Syrian authorities are doing is wrong, it is counter-productive and it is against the interests of stability in Syria. The international community must send a firm message to that effect.

We also discussed Libya and the meeting of the Contact Group in Rome later this week, where we and our allies will reinforce our commitment to implementing UNSCRs 1970 and 1973 and to increasing pressure on the Qadhafi regime. Time is not on Qadhafi's side. We are committed to supporting the people of Libya as they seek to determine their own future - just as you are doing here in Egypt - free of violence and of dictatorship.

Finally the Minister and I had in-depth discussions about the search for a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We renew our calls on both sides to commit to peace talks, leading to a Palestinian state that exists in peace and security alongside Israel. Britain hopes that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will lead to the formation of a government that rejects violence and pursues a negotiated peace, and we will judge a future Palestinian government by its actions and its readiness to work for peace.

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