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Arab Spring shows ‘new way of working’ needed at UN, United Kingdom says



Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom

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The conflict in Libya and the broader Arab Spring pro-democracy movement demonstrates that the United Nations must act with vigour to ensure people everywhere are able to enjoy important freedoms and opportunities, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom said today.

“The UN needs a new way of working,” David Cameron [told](#) the second day of the General Assembly’s annual general debate, noting the events this year in North Africa and the Middle East, where long-term regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt have been toppled and widespread unrest has struck Syria, Yemen and Bahrain.

“The Arab Spring is a massive opportunity to spread peace, prosperity, democracy and, vitally, security, but only if we really seize it.”

Mr. Cameron said the popular uprisings presented challenges not only to individual countries to give “their people the freedoms they deserve,” but also to the UN.

“You can sign every human rights declaration in the world, but if you stand by and watch people being slaughtered in their own country when you could act, then what are those signatures really worth?” he asked.

“The UN has to show that we can be – not just united in condemnation, but – united in action, acting in a way that lives up to the UN’s founding principles and meets the needs of people everywhere.”

He said the people of the Arab world had clearly indicated that they want transparent and accountable government, an end to corruption, consistent rule of law, freedom of expression and genuine job opportunities.

Turning to Libya, he commended for the UN for its “vital role authorizing international action” after forces supporting the regime of Muammar al-Qadhafi, since ousted, began attacking civilians earlier this year.

“But let’s be clear: the United Nations is no more effective than the nation States that come together to enforce its will. And on this occasion a coalition of nations across the Western and Arab world had the will to act. In so doing, they stopped Benghazi from joining Srebrenica and Rwanda in history’s painful roll call of massacres the world failed to prevent.”

Mr. Cameron emphasized that “at the UN we have a responsibility to stand up against regimes that persecute their people. We need to see reform in Yemen. And above all, on Syria, it is time for the members of the Security Council to act.

“Of course we should always act with care when it comes to the internal affairs of a sovereign State. But we cannot allow this to be an excuse for indifference in the face of a regime that week after week arrests, intimidates, tortures and kills people who are peacefully trying to make their voices heard.”

The President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, said the Arab Spring is “one of the most momentous political developments since the end of the Cold War, and that Europeans want to see it blossom.

“That’s why we support all steps towards democratic transformation and economic reforms benefiting the people – with financial resources, with access to our markets, with mobility among our countries, and with assistance for state- and nation-building,” he told the Assembly.

But European support did not stop there, Mr. Van Rompuy added. “When, earlier this year, there was the risk of a bloodbath in Benghazi, European leaders, together with others, acted with

swiftness and determination, diplomatically and militarily. We could not allow the Libyan regime to take the lives of its own people.

“The principle of responsibility to protect was put into action – with perseverance and success. Now there is a ‘responsibility to assist’ the new Libya with the political transition, the reconciliation and the reconstruction of a united country... Europe was, is, and will remain on the side of the Libyans,” he stated.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa also featured prominently in separate discussions [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) held today with [Mr. Cameron](#); [Mr. Van Rompuy](#) and [Jose Manuel Barroso](#), President of the European Commission; and [Catherine Ashton](#), High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

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