

Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, Debate on
Situation in the Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities, at the United Nations
Security Council, on 12 March 2012

Thank you, Mr President.

Let me begin by welcoming you, Mr Foreign Secretary, and other Ministers to the Security Council. I would like to thank the UK delegation for organizing today's Debate to discuss developments in West Asia and North Africa over the last year. I would also like to thank the Secretary General and other distinguished speakers and you, Mr President, for the valuable statements. We have listened carefully to the views expressed and hope that today's deliberations will help the international community develop a more coordinated and consensual outlook to the serious challenges posed by developments in the region and beyond.

2. Mr President, for more than a millennium now, societies in West Asia and North Africa have played an important role in world history. By virtue of the genius of their peoples, their strategic location and, more recently, their natural resources, these societies have attracted considerable interest from far and wide. Over centuries, countries in the region have built multifaceted socio-economic and strategic linkages with the rest of world. Developments in the region have implications within and beyond the region and they naturally are of interest to the international community.

3. The relationship between India and the Arab world is unique with age-old historic and cultural connections. The impact of the Arab and Islamic world on India itself has been profound and far-reaching; giving rise to a composite culture that is rich in its diversity and enduring in its essential unity. The region is home to over 6 million Indians with some of our largest economic and trade linkages. It is also the most important source for our energy needs and, being in our extended neighborhood, vitally important to India.

4. The unrest in West Asia and North Africa, which began more than a year ago, has its roots in the desire of people to play a greater role in shaping their destiny, politically and economically. These aspirations will not be met through violence or armed struggle. Nor can a solution be reached through prescriptions from outside. In fact, given the history of foreign interference, such prescriptions will not only be suspect in the eyes of various segments of society but may also have the potential to exacerbate the problem.

5. Mr President, in dealing with developments in West Asia and North Africa, the international community needs to use all the tools of diplomacy at its disposal and be there to assist the concerned countries in transiting to an inclusive and participatory polity while maintaining social stability and cohesion. Since the exact nature of grievances varies from country to country, there cannot be one set of measures that can be applied to all of them. The solutions of the problems in each country have to take into consideration the society's particular circumstances and the genius of its

people. However, what is certain is that solutions cannot include intervention through military force or arming of the civilian population. Such a course of action will only fuel further bloodshed and instability and create new marginalized groups. This also risks breeding extremism and intolerance whose adverse consequences will be felt in the region and beyond.

6. I would like to recall what the Father of the Indian Nation, Mahatma Gandhi said, and I quote, “Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind”. Even during the course of the last year, we have seen that wherever changes have taken place without violence, not only has normalcy returned faster, the changes have been accepted by society as a whole. We are, therefore, of the considered view that the political leaders of the concerned countries in West Asia and North Africa should resolve the problem through inclusive internal political processes that meet the aspirations of their people in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed. The principles of national sovereignty, political independence and territorial unity and integrity must be respected. The international community should, including through the auspices of the United Nations, use diplomatic leverages and make available technical assistance in fields such as political, security and justice sector reforms, drafting of new constitution and legal frameworks, electoral institutions and conduct of elections, etc. Actions based on selective or partial interpretations of a mandate of the United Nations must be avoided to ensure that long-term political reconciliation is achieved among various sections of society through peaceful inclusive political processes.

7. Mr President, the international community also needs to be galvanized to expeditiously resolve the long-pending problem of the West Asian and North African region, namely the Arab-Israeli conflict, including Israeli-Palestinian problem. This problem cannot be allowed to be lost in the din and pre-occupations of other developments in the region. Quite apart from the fact that without resolution of this conflict, developments in West Asia and North Africa cannot be adequately addressed, we seriously run the risk of violence if the people of Palestine feel marginalized and sense a complete loss of attention to their plight. Their protests may get radicalized unless concrete action is taken to end the occupation of Arab lands so that all peoples in the region can live in peace in their respective homelands and build cooperative relations. Moreover, the call of the international community for democratic and political reforms sounds hollow to Palestinian and other people in the region living under occupation. In this connection, some important and immediate measures need to be taken, including end to all settlement activities and favourable consideration by this Council of the Palestinian application for membership to this Organization.

8. Mr President, as the world’s largest democracy, India supports measures by the countries in the region to address the grievances of their people in an atmosphere free of violence and bloodshed. India stands ready to share its experiences with the concerned countries in building democratic and plural political institutions and to partner with them in such fields as drafting of new constitutional and legal frameworks, judicial and security sector reforms, creation of impartial and

independent electoral institutions and conduct of elections, human resources development, including training and technical assistance, etc.

9. India will continue to support this Council in meeting the challenge of assisting the countries in West Asia and North Africa so that they can implement required political reforms without recourse to violence and violation of fundamental human rights and build an inclusive political system that enables participation of all people. This alone will create long-term peace, security and stability within the region and beyond.

I thank you.

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