

DECLARATION

Winning the Transition to Democracy in the Arab World

With the participation of leaders, delegates and representatives of progressive democratic forces from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara, Yemen and other members of the organisation, the Special Committee on the Arab World of the Socialist International established at the SI Council held in Athens on July 2011, held its constituent meeting on the island of Crete hosted by the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

Ten months since the mobilisation of the Arab peoples for freedom and rights which began in Tunisia, bringing to the streets of Arab cities millions of citizens with courage and enthusiasm to bring about change and leave behind authoritarianism and dictatorships, a crucial page of history continues to be written which is demonstrating that nothing less than democracy will do for the Arab nations.

The Socialist International, which from the first day supported these movements, is determined to continue to be engaged on the side of all those political and civil society forces to assist in the full realisation of the vision and goals of the great majority of people in the Arab countries who, even at the cost of their own lives, are transforming the face of their societies.

The achievement of democratic governance, political, social and economic rights for all is the immediate objective and the promise that inspires and drives all those meeting in Crete today. The development of new political forces will take its time, the drafting of new democratic constitutions will require the attention of many, the organisation of free and fair elections will need to be well prepared, but the demand and the urgency to win the democratic transition now cannot be postponed.

In the exchanges held by participants, the obstacles, the dilemmas and challenges that the new situation presents were recognised and identified.

The Committee considers that legitimising the will of the people is the crucial and determinant priority in ensuring the sustainability of the new democracies. Those who persist in retaining power illegitimately have to give way to the call for democracy; those who are engaged in organising the transitions have to respond to the expectations of the people for instituting without unnecessary delay the democratic changes expected now, and the support and solidarity of the international community for those new emerging political systems must be a priority.

Participants at the meeting stressed that the priorities in the road map for democracy in the Arab world need to include first, the full participation of all citizens in the political process irrespective of religion, gender, ethnic origin or political beliefs; secondly, the establishment or strengthening of reliable, transparent and effective institutions which should include women in line with their important role in the democratic struggle; thirdly, equal opportunities for all with regard to social and economic rights including decent jobs, health systems, education and efficient public services; and fourthly the use of natural and other resources to the benefit of their populations, both of today and of future generations.

The Socialist International will carefully monitor the electoral processes in the Arab world. Recent free and fair elections in Tunisia with a high level of participation were a positive and encouraging step on the way to a successful transition to democracy. We hope that all the necessary measures will be taken to ensure transparent and fair elections in Egypt in the coming months. Participants

expressed best wishes of success to the USFP in the forthcoming elections in Morocco. The meeting agreed on the critical need for free and fair elections in Mauritania as a prerequisite for genuine democracy in that country. The Committee congratulated the National Transitional Council (NTC) and the people of Libya on the liberation of their country, underlining the support of the Socialist International in their efforts for reconstruction and national reconciliation. The ongoing and persistent violence by the Syrian regime against its own people, with countless deaths of innocent civilians demonstrating for freedom and democracy was firmly condemned by all participants, who reiterated the International's support for the democratic struggle of the Syrian people. The protection of civilians in Syria is paramount and the International will continue to be seized on this matter to guarantee the lives of those protesting.

Equally, the Committee deplored and condemned the continuing violence against the people of Yemen by the Saleh regime, and demanded the departure of the current ruler and an immediate transition to democracy. The Yemeni people can count on our wholehearted support and solidarity as they courageously take to the street of their cities, risking their lives to pursue a future in which their voices can be heard. The Committee highlighted the example of Tawakkul Karman from Yemen, winner of this year's Nobel Peace prize and agreed to invite her to address a gathering of the Socialist International. The Committee reiterated the support of the Socialist International for the membership of Palestine in the United Nations following recognition of the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and the SI's call for immediate re-starting of negotiations as proposed by President Abbas leading to a two-State solution, which is key to regional stability. Participants at the meeting agreed that an important contribution to this stability would also be a peaceful and lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the Council of the SI held in Athens last July. The recent kidnapping of European aid workers from the refugee camps in Tinduf was condemned and the meeting demanded their immediate liberation.

Among the objectives of the Committee and the orientation of its future work, were the support and solidarity to those in the front line of the democratic struggle, the learning from and sharing of experiences, the development of a common vision among those involved in its work, the search for common definitions and policies to implement, and to nurture a culture of networking beyond national borders and between peoples.

Recognising the historic and symbolic importance of the venue of the meeting, the participants committed themselves to put in place, with the utmost priority, a new common undertaking, which they decided to call "the spirit of Crete", for democracy and freedom for the people of the Arab nations.