

**Listening to progressive Mediterranean
“A Progressive Agenda for a new Arab World:”
Tunis, 30 March 2012**

Statement “Solidarity with people in struggle”

When the young people and women’s movements of the Arab World took to the streets over a year ago, calling for freedom, justice and democracy, a historic moment occurred. Despite the risks to their personal safety that they faced, these brave people would not give up on their demands for their rights. While some countries have succeeded in ousting the tyrants that ruled with an iron fist over them for years, others are still fighting for their freedom.

The **Syrian** people are paying an enormous price as they face Assad’s regime of brutal oppression. With a death toll close to 8500 people thus far, it is clear that this cannot continue. The participants of the conference call the members of the international community to take responsibility to stop the massacres and to promote a fair and sustainable solution. The United Nations Security Council has a unique role to play in exerting additional pressure on Damascus, with China and Russia taking a more productive position. The mediation efforts of the Arab League proposing a credible plan for a swift and effective transition to democratic progress and creating the conditions for humanitarian access and assistance to the civilian population are still essential. The plan calls for the current President to step down for dialogue between regime and opposition, for the formation of a national unity government, the election of a constituent assembly and free elections. Recent efforts of the UNSG Special Envoy, Kofi Annan, have led to an agreement that hopefully will end violence. The 6 points plan should now lead to a political solution to the crisis especially through the processes to address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people.

The **Libyan** people are still waiting to take full benefit of their newly gained freedom, since there is great need for assistance to build institutional capacity for national governance, free media and civil society expression. Elections will take place next June; however, political parties are still being established. We will closely follow the building of progressive movements in the country. Full participation of Libyan women in elections, political decision making and governance is crucial to us. Furthermore national reconciliation should be enhanced with progress made in transitional justice. A free and secure Libya must afford migrants the protection of a legal status. Finally, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants in civilian life, together with the reform of the security sector, must be a priority.

Bahrain is still facing ongoing problems and repression in the revolution there. The continued and extreme use of force by Bahraini authorities against protestors claiming legitimate democratic reforms is unacceptable. We condemn the role that Saudi Arabia took in violent repressions in Bahrain, including the sending of armed forces into Bahrain. There needs to be a meaningful and inclusive national dialogue between all stakeholders in Bahrain to avoid a further escalation of violence. The Manama document serves as a valid and reasonable ground for a meaningful dialogue. This dialogue, however, cannot be genuine if political leaders are detained under illegitimate grounds. We call for the release of all political prisoners in Bahrain as recommended by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

While **Algeria** is the richest and most populated country in the Maghreb, it is also one of the most unequal in the region. Algeria's wealth should be fairly redistributed in the interest of the people and serve to promote development in the country. Reforms are vital in the political system and term limits must be respected. Freedom of media, of association and of demonstration should be protected comprehensively under the rule of law. A meaningful social and political debate including the authorities, political parties, trade unions and civil society must take place to give clear democratic, economic and social perspectives to Algerian people. We support that the Socialist Forces Front (FFS) who will participate in the upcoming election for the first time in many years.

Heeding the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region must encompass supporting the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination, freedom, justice and dignity, including through recognition of the State of Palestine on 1967 borders and its membership in the UN. This support includes intensifying efforts to end settlement activities allowing resumption of peace negotiations. The European Union must intensify efforts making use of all available instruments to achieve this objective avoiding any double standard respecting human rights obligations. Welcoming the recent exchange deal, we call for the immediate release of all Palestinian MPs, including Marwan Barghouti, the pre-Oslo prisoners, and the administrative detainees who have been undertaking hunger strikes to uphold their rights. We emphasise the importance of restoring the unity of the Palestinian people and land, and of resuming democratic life. It is urgent to address the current policies and to end the occupation in order to ensure both sides' security and to swiftly implement the two-state solution. The PES expresses its support to Israeli peace movements working to achieve these goals.

While other **Gulf countries** have not seen the kind of uprising that happened throughout other parts of the Arab World, there is a need for profound changes. Debates need to take place in **Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia** and **Qatar** about how to achieve real democratic reforms which ensure equal rights and representation of women and men. We should closely follow the situation and look to establish contacts with progressives, trade unions, NGOs from these countries.

Following the early elections held in **Morocco** at the end of 2011, the USFP and other progressive partners in the country decided not to join the governing coalition and to be in opposition. The USFP is taking full advantage of its opposition role to build an even more solid and modern progressive party able to promote new and innovative policies while carefully monitoring the government and its legislative work. Activists in Morocco, alongside the movements of the Arab Spring in the wider region, continue in their calls for more social justice, more dignity for women and men as well as the instalment of a parliamentary monarchy.

Lebanon has lived through turbulent times in the past years but is now passing through a moment of precarious stability. As always, the situation of neighbouring countries has a direct impact on Lebanese political life. The Cedar revolution in 2005 has opened opportunities for the country. It is important to support the work of the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) on the killing of late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in order to allow the country to move towards a real democratic system.

Mauritania has been ruled by a military regime for more than 30 years, with continued repression against democratic and human rights activists. The demands of the Assembly of Democratic Forces as well as those of all other democratic movements in **Mauritania** must be supported and sustained. It is crucial that a transitional government is put in place which can guarantee genuine free and fair elections. The emergence of new institutions including an Independent Electoral Commission must be fostered to ensure a fully democratic process in line with international standards.

The ongoing repression of democratic movements in **Iran** must stop. It is time to have a democratic opening of the regime. We demand free and fair elections in Iran. We call for the liberation of detained opposition leaders including Moussavi, Karoubi, Rahnavard and all other prisoners currently in jail for their political beliefs and calls for freedom.

Iraq continues to be faced with significant domestic challenges. We strongly condemn the continued bombing attacks with a tragic impact on the civilian population and express our solidarity to President Talabani and the Iraqi people for the unacceptable toll on innocent lives. PUK and progressive partners in the country are committed to achieve peace, security and prosperity for Iraq and its people.

Promises in **Yemen** that there will be a change of power to a new President should be fulfilled in as smooth a transition as possible. This new President must ensure that democracy is truly achieved and is long-lasting. The Yemeni people will not accept anything less than a real change in the regime.

In **Egypt** elections were met with violence and continued repression. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) must hand over power to a democratically elected civilian government and allow for a real transition to take place. The upcoming Presidential elections must be free, fair and with the participation of international observers if so requested. The Constituent Assembly, comprised of 50 MPs and 50 members from outside parliament, should hold its first meeting on March 28. While originally members of socialist and social democratic parties were present on the Constituent Assembly, they have since decided to boycott the Assembly, stating that it does not fully represent Egyptian society and is dominated by Conservatives and religious figures. Furthermore, there is a huge disparity in the number of women participating in this assembly, far less than is necessary for a balanced representation. We condemn the attack on Kamal Abbas director of the Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Services (CTUWS) in Egypt, who has been sentenced to six months in prison in February 2012 for speeches disapproving of the former regime at an ILO Conference. This blatant attack on the freedom of trade unions is unacceptable in an aspiring democratic society. We support Kamal Abbas in his upcoming appeal on April 8 and strongly urge the Egyptian authorities to cease with this unacceptable violation of his civil rights.

Tunisia is a model of how this democratic transition can be progressively achieved despite obstacles and constraints. The Tunisian people achieved great success and they should be proud to be an example for other countries. The formation of the Constituent Assembly with Mustapha Ben Jaafar as its President was a historical moment for the Progressive movement and one that we hope will be repeated in many other countries. The EU must react to these positive developments by delivering on the demands to grant advanced status to Tunisia in line with its newly developed principle of "more for more" and the commitment by both sides to take the partnership forward. We welcome the decision on the date of the next elections, set for March 23rd 2013. We will monitor the process before and during the elections carefully to ensure that the positive momentum for democratic transition will continue successfully.

We stand with our Progressive partners throughout the Arab World and we continue to support their struggles, at each step on the path towards long lasting and true democracy.