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**STATEMENT BY H.E. HAROLD CABALLEROS,  
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**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

**Situation in the Middle East: challenges and opportunities for  
peace and Security**

**(March 12, 2012)**

Mr. President,

We thank the United Kingdom for having organized this debate, as we also appreciate your own gesture in presiding it. We further are grateful to the Secretary-General for his presentation to us.

I must say that the theme selected for our debate of today, while fascinating, in fact poses a big challenge. In contrast to other specific topics that we have discussed in the past and that are susceptible to more or less precise reactions, on this occasion you have proposed a more general subject, which entails the risk of diluting any message we would wish to convey.

It would be presumptuous on our part to offer interpretations of the significance of what has been labeled as the “Arab Spring”, whose paradigmatic image, and which captivated the whole world’s attention, occurred in Tahrir Square in Cairo in January of 2011. The extraordinary courage of the people, their serenity, their solidarity, the persistence in their demands, and above all their pacific nature were a source of inspiration for all humanity. While taking note of the enormous differences between these singular events in contrast with the transitions that occurred in my own region between 1980 and 1990, from authoritarian regimes to civilian, democratically elected governments, I would like to respond to the challenge that you have posed to us, Mr. President, with a brief comment on “lessons learned” from our own experience, and which can provide some tangible inputs to today’s debate. With some modesty, and fully aware of the important historical, cultural, religious and political differences existing between our respective regions, and even within them, I draw on the experiences of my own country to briefly suggest seven points.

First, each case in Latin America was unique, and surely each situation in the Middle East will also be so. For example, in my own country, we faced the need to adopt a project for a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual nation, responding to the unique realities of Guatemala, which are not necessarily the same as those of other countries in

Latin America. That is why, although it sounds trite to state that there are no universally valid formulas for transitions, in spite of the fact that democratic values are similar everywhere, their concrete expression in terms of internal organization, institutional and juridical arrangements, and forms of popular participation can vary greatly from one situation to the next.

Second, cultural values do matter, especially in multiethnic societies which seek to build a nation where mutual respect and tolerance prevail. Those cultural values must be compatible with democratic societies and commitment with economic and social progress. For example, it is important that everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, local affiliation, race or creed have access to the same opportunities. I am pleased to state that these values have been assimilated and consolidated in our region, and hope the same will occur in the countries subject of our debate.

Third, progress is decidedly not linear. It is not easy to develop plural and participatory systems of governance where no previous democratic culture has taken solid roots. It requires the strengthening – and sometimes the creation – of institutions in diverse areas, including a solid constitutional and legal cornerstone, the development of representative political parties, and the guarantee of freedom of expression. The agenda is complex; it touches on many vested interests, generates often unforeseen consequences and from time to time requires a change in course. What is important is to persist, and trust that the millennium-old cultures that have contributed so much to the civilized world will find the strength, creativity and leadership to take their democratization process to safe port.

That takes me to my fourth point. The democratization processes must respond to the aspirations and agreements of the people and national societies. They must be the product of a sense of ownership – akin to a national consensus – and not something imposed from outside. Realizing a model with which the citizenship feels comfortable often involves long periods of trial and adjustment, which only confirms my previous points that we are dealing with long-term processes. These processes only respond to the wishes of their own citizens. Also, representative democracy has as a requisite that citizens have confidence in the Government they elect.

Fifth, today it is fashionable in the United Nations to talk about the rule of law, a topic that did not figure as prominently in our agenda a few years ago. I would like to confirm from the vantage point of my own country the crucial importance of having solid institutions to combat impunity, lack of transparency in the management of public finances, and, in general, the administration of justice. We foresaw this in our Peace Accords, but confirm it more directly in addressing the threat posed to the rule of law in our country by the appearance of transnational criminal cartels. Combating this scourge requires strengthening our capacity in the area of criminal prosecution, our judicial system, our civil police, and even our jail system. Surely the same will hold true regarding the democratization processes underway in the Middle East.

In the sixth place, in the case of Latin America in general and Central America in particular, the transition to democracy came together with a strong boost to intraregional cooperation. The appearance of Governments with shared values facilitated agreements

and promoted regionalism. In our case, cooperating to resolve common problems and promoting mutual support strengthened democracy in each country, and contributed to its collective defense. We believe that this phenomenon of cooperation is pertinent to the countries that are the subject of today's debate, which is already taking form in the increasingly important role being played by the League of Arab States.

Lastly, let us not forget the imperative of promoting economic and social development. It is true that people demand liberty and dignity, but they also demand greater welfare, especially in societies that are marked by high levels of inequality. It is interesting to note that, in accordance with the main source of public opinion polling in our region, Latinobarómetro, there is a close correlation between economic performance and the level of satisfaction with democracy. It appears that the population does not only aspire, but demands that more plural and representative Governments generate tangible results for their citizens. When this does not occur, the index of satisfaction with democratic institutions falls dramatically.

Mr. President,

The so-called "Arab Spring" evokes sentiments that are, in balance, of a positive nature. That is why I have concentrated more on the opportunities than on the challenges in my statement. That is also why I have deliberately avoided touching on other topics which some would consider obligatory when discussing the Middle East, such as the imperative of overcoming the conflict between Israel and Palestine, or addressing the situation in Syria, since we have addressed these matters in other meetings of the Council.

Thank you.