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**STATEMENT BY H.E. HAROLD CABALLEROS
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GUATEMALA**

SECURITY COUNCIL

Debate on the Situation in the Middle East
(31 January, 2012)

Mr. President,

Allow me to begin my statement on a personal note. I represent the Government of President Otto Pérez Molina, which took office barely two weeks ago. My presence reflects our commitment to the United Nations, as well as our intention to carry out our role as a recently elected member of this Council in a responsible manner. We are here fully committed to build consensus for the maintenance of international peace and security.

We appreciate the convening of the important meeting in response to the request made by the League of Arab States in its letter of 22 January addressed to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We are especially pleased at the presence of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Nabil Al-Arabi as well as the President of the Council of Ministers, H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thhani, and the information provided by them. We have also listened attentively to the statement of Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari of the Arab Republic of Syria.

In addition to the information provided today, we have previously had access to the decisions that over the past weeks were adopted by the Council of Ministers, the Protocol signed between the League of Arab States and the Government of Syria on 19 December, 2011, as well as the text of the Report prepared by the Head of the Observer Mission, General Mustafa Al-Dabi. All of the above has improved our capacity to understand what is happening on the ground, and at the same time has contributed to our increasing alarm at a clearly deteriorating situation. The events of the past few days, and the decision to suspend the League of Arab States' Mission, have only served to heighten our apprehensions.

Mr. President,

Once again this Council addresses the possible management on the part of the community of nations of the amazing changes that are occurring in the Middle East and the North of the African Continent. As with all change, especially when it surges from the grass roots of society, its final outcome tends to be unpredictable. We commonly affirm that those changes are the purview only and exclusively of the citizens of each country, but it are undeniable – and events confirm this to be the case – that the wave of change does not recognize borders, and that whatever happens in any specific nation impacts upon the rest. This explains the presence of the League of Arab States in the case we are dealing with today: the situation in Syria.

We have listened attentively to the different narratives offered on the matter, which, among other aspects, try to assign quotas of responsibility to different actors, domestic and foreign. While the facts of what actually is happening are sorted out (a task made more difficult due to the lack of access to the media, and in spite of the presence until a few days ago of the Mission of Observers), two realities overshadow the rest. First, the increasing toll of human life and the general suffering imposed on the population. Second, the spiral of violence that points at the real possibility of a civil war between Syrians. The immediate task at hand, then, is to put an end to violence and to reverse the current trends that points to even greater misfortunes.

The League of Arab States must be commended for occupying the front lines that pursue these two objectives. We also sympathize with the initiative of the Organization that seeks what is termed as an “Arab solution” to the crisis. Our delegation is prepared to accompany the League of Arab States in the fulfillment of said solution, whose prime objective is humanitarian in nature, but whose broader objective is viewed in the framework of a longer term firm political solution. Some question whether this initiative is realistic, given the immediate rejection it provoked from the Government of the Arab Republic of Syria. But for our part, we are willing to give the League of Arab States the opportunity to pursue their initiative within a predetermined time frame.

Should this initiative not bear fruit, we believe that, whether we like it or not, we would be failing our obligation if we permit that an already grave situation deteriorates even further, with the foreseeable domestic and international repercussions on peace and security.

We are more than aware of the serious dilemmas that this poses. Non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign States and the respect for their territorial integrity are cardinal principles of our foreign policy. But we also acknowledge the obligation of all States to observe certain norms of conduct in relations to their own populations. We understand that popular demands expressed in a pacific manner can not be equated with a Government that uses force to address those demands. That is why, in an era when the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is being questioned, we are not ashamed to affirm that, with some nuances that we have explained in other forums, we support that principle. This is not to say that our position invites interventions; far from it. What we demand is the strict observation of the norms of conduct referred to above. In its absence, the Governments that flagrantly violates those norms naturally

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expose themselves to suffer the consequences; consequences whose precise shape and scope are susceptible to a wide spectrum of possibilities.

In summary, we appeal to all parties to make a last effort to find a way out for the Syrian crisis. The initiative of the League of Arab States, or variants thereof, offer the potential for such a way out. Should it fail, the escalation of violence, which has taken on dramatic proportions in the last days, has not left many options to this Council to carry out its own responsibility in accordance with the Charter.

Thank you, Mr. President.

