

Guatemalan Foreign Minister Calls on States' Responsibility to Protect during Security Council Syria Debate

31 January 2012

On 31 January 2012 the Security Council convened a debate on the Middle East which focused on the current situation in Syria. The debate was attended by high-level diplomats including Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, League of Arab States Secretary-General Nabil Elarby, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and French Foreign Minister

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The Qatari Prime Minister and Arab League Secretary-General briefed the Security Council on the current situation in Syria. They called on the Council to adopt a draft resolution supporting an Arab League plan to address the conflict, which includes a request for the country's President, Bashar al-Assad, to step down. This was met with opposition by Russia and China, who continue to refuse any action that suggests some form of regime change.

The Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Harold Caballeros, made it clear in his statement that Security Council members had a duty to act under the principles of RtoP. Exerpts from his statement can be found [below](#) ; for the full statement, see [here](#) .

For background information including details and analysis of country positions in the lead-up to the debate, see the [ICRtoP Blog](#) .

Mr. President, (...) 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-Thani, 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. (...)

(...) 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. (...)

(...) 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 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.