

## How Canada can help Libya

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Ottawa Citizen  
25 February 2011

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The people-powered revolution that has spread through North Africa and the Middle East since Tunisian citizen Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in December 2010 has hit a crescendo with Libya. The protests against state repression, with the assistance of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, confronted elsewhere largely peacefully, have now turned deadly in Libya.

"I will fight to the last drop of my blood," declared the embattled, delusional and megalomaniacal Libyan leader, Col. Moammar Gadhafi. Calling protesters "cockroaches" and attributing Libya's unrest to the influence of foreigners, Gadhafi threatened to "cleanse Libya house by house" -hearkening dangerously to the mass, door-to-door violence we remember from atrocities elsewhere in history.

In 2005, Canada and the international community declared unanimously its "responsibility to protect" (R2P) populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, including their incitement, where sovereign states prove unable or unwilling to do so. Subsequent to this aspirational declaration, R2P has been exercised neither clearly nor consistently when needed most. And, as a doctrine, it is hollow if it is not backed up with the will to engage or the actual capacity to deploy. Its application is now required, through multilateral initiative and the UN, desperately in Libya. (...)

We appreciate our government's concern for Canadian citizens in Libya and its deep regret for the loss of Libyan life. But we agree that Canada, with a loud and clear moral voice, must abhor what U.S. Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman have described as "crimes against humanity" and demonstrate its responsibility to protect Libyans by endorsing and recommending the following proposals:

An international arms and military technology embargo to prevent the sale and further delivery of equipment or support to Libyan security forces must be imposed, while refraining from commercial sanctions that would affect civilians more adversely.

The UN Security Council must impose sweeping sanctions on Gadhafi, his family and regime retainers responsible for the repression. Their assets should be frozen immediately and an explicit travel ban should be enforced. While the U.S. and European Union consider these steps, Canada should initiate its own sanctions to encourage similar action.

As Libya is not a party to the International Criminal Court (ICC), its leaders should be referred by the Security Council to the ICC for an immediate investigation into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Echoing calls by courageous Libyan diplomats, American lawmakers, UN officials and advocacy groups, a no-fly zone should be established under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and enforced, perhaps by NATO, over Libya to prevent air attacks against civilians.

Support from the international community, and Canada especially, should be offered for building Libyan civil society and the national institutions neglected and denied during Gadhafi's four-decade, one-man rule.

Although the Security Council has expressed "grave concern" and called on Libya "to meet its responsibility to protect its population," its issuance of a press statement is insufficient to communicate the gravity of the situation that Libyans face -namely, the threat of mass atrocities. Time is literally of the essence.

The Arab League's suspension of Libya from participating in its meetings was a positive first step. The cascade of Libyan diplomats and high-level aides who have resigned and continue to defect -including the country's interior and justice ministers and diplomats at embassies in Canada, the U.S., the UN, and elsewhere -should be lauded for their courage.

But strong words must be paired with strong action. Canada and the international community must stand by the people of Libya who, like so many others throughout the Arab world, seek the basic human rights that should be enjoyed by all who desire them. Whereas the protests elsewhere have led to relatively peaceful transitions or to dialogues for reform, Libya's rulers have chosen repression and slaughter.

Our response may very well determine whether the next authoritarian government threatened follows Gadhafi's lead. This is not about picking winners; it's about being on the right side of history by saving human lives.

We have seen the cost of inaction, delay and obfuscation on innocent populations elsewhere. The Responsibility to Protect is about the world engaging when a civilian population is under attack -either from its own government or because its government lacks the means or will to protect it. Libya is one of the clearest examples yet of just such a circumstance.

Canada has an opportunity to help build a coalition at the UN for rapid engagement. This needs to be a matter of hours and days, not weeks and months.

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