

RELEASE IN FULL

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In its extraordinary meeting on 11 March, the European Council clearly and forcefully expressed its views on the Libyan crisis.

The next day, the Arab League adopted an unprecedented resolution calling on the Security Council "to impose immediately a no-fly zone" and adopt "preventive measures enabling the protection of people living in Libya". Five days later, in response to this appeal, the Security Council adopted resolution 1973.

Mandated by the Security Council, a coalition of European, North American and Arab countries was organised in the very brief time allowed by the urgency of the situation. The Paris Summit held on 19 March emphasized the determination of the participants to conduct operations in full compliance with and strictly within the terms of resolution 1973. In particular, we do not envisage any military occupation of Libya, which would be contrary to the terms of the resolution.

By acting immediately, we were able, first, to break the grip of tanks threatening a massacre in the city of Benghazi. By imposing the no-fly zone and reducing the Libyan forces' capacity for movement, we have already achieved a very significant reduction in the number of civilian victims.

By responding to the Arab League's appeal to put an end "to the violence and the crimes and exactions perpetrated by the Libyan authorities against the Libyan people", the coalition has, for the first time, implemented the "responsibility to protect" defined by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005.

We welcome the international conference to be held in London on 29 March, which will discuss the situation in Libya, take stock of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973 (2011), consider the humanitarian needs of the Libyan people and identify ways to support the people of Libya in their aspirations for a better future.

Military action is not an objective as such. The solution can only be a political one that belongs to the Libyan people. When demands expressed by resolution 1973 are entirely implemented, in particular the cessation of attacks against civilians, and when all military units and all individuals who recognise Muammar Gaddafi's authority stop violence and have withdrawn from the towns and areas where they entered by force, then the coalition should immediately suspend its military action against those units.

The current regime has completely lost its legitimacy, in the very words of the Arab League resolution. We call all those, including the Interim National Transitional Council who believe that Colonel Gaddafi is leading Libya into an impasse to organize a transition process.

We encourage the Interim National Transitional Council, the tribal leaders from all Libya as well as all those Libyan officials prepared to join the process of transition to democracy, to take an immediate initiative to hold a gathering. We call on the EU to support this, along with the Arab League as well as the UN and the African Union.

In the last few weeks, the Libyan people have demonstrated their courage and their determination. Like all other peoples, they have the right freely to choose their leaders.