



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

1st Standing Committee on Political and Security-related Cooperation

Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East and Arab Spring

Political Developments in the Middle East and North Africa

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Report unanimously adopted during the 8th PAM Plenary Session in Marseille, 20 January 2014

Two years after the first signs of the Arab Awakening, the MENA region is still under the impact of the unprecedented political change that took place, and which is still ongoing, in several Arab countries. This transition period is not without significant obstacles in terms of the development of new constitutions, ensuring the Rule of Law, applying social reforms and, above all, addressing social and economic problems. Furthermore, it is still not clear whether these political changes are facilitating the Middle East Peace Process or rather the opposite.

This report attempts to outline the latest developments in the Middle East and the transition processes following the Arab Awakening. It moreover describes PAM's efforts and endeavours in supporting initiatives for peace building in the Middle East and gives an overview of the political situation in the MENA region. Although the main focus of this report is on the Middle East Peace Process and the Syrian crisis, the political transition process in the post-Arab Spring countries, such as Libya and Egypt, and top-down political reforms caused by regional turmoil, are also analyzed.

I. The Middle East Peace Process 2012-2013

In 2012 and 2013 outbreaks of violence, such as the Syrian crisis and the political changes in Egypt, have over-shadowed the Middle East Peace Process. Nevertheless, the stagnation of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians remained the most important element affecting the Peace Process in 2012. In July 2013, however, talks were re-launched, mediated by US Secretary of State John Kerry. To date, Israelis and Palestinians remain committed to the negotiations and the US has finally increased the pace of the process and assumed an even more proactive role. Unfortunately, recently peace talks suffered a setback due to the resignation of Palestinian negotiators after Israel's announcement to build 20,000 new settler homes in the West Bank, a plan which was later reversed. PAM, as the majority of the members of the

international community, considers the Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a serious obstacle to a two-state solution. According to the UN, notably UNSCO, and the Quartet, Israel's settlement policy constitutes a breach of international law. The key decision to stop the plan to build more settlements was communicated to PAM directly during PAM's visit to Jerusalem on 13 November 2013, on the occasion of a high-level mission to Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem by H.E. Amb. Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as by Hon. Tzipi Livni, Israeli Minister of Justice and top negotiator for the peace talks. Amb. Serry met PAM in Jerusalem. He stressed the importance of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, aimed at reaching an agreement. He underlined that PAM has an important role since it is a one forum where both parties continued to meet over the past four years and discuss the relative and relevant issues. Acting on a direct request by Amb. Serry, PAM collaborated with Syrian Authorities and the Palestinian National Council (PNC) to monitor the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

This request echoes the United Nations Secretary-General's, Ban Ki-moon, and Tony Blair's calling on the international community to prioritize the Middle East Peace Process in 2013, since the UN Secretary-General feared that a long period of suspension of the Peace Process might have conveyed the impression that a two-state solution is no longer viable. PAM is convinced that all international players should put additional effort into the resolution of the permanent issues, such as the border issue addressed in the UN resolution 242 (1967).

As for the two-state solution's viability, it was a critical step when the Palestinian Authority succeeded to obtain a Non-Member State Observer status to the UN General Assembly on 29 November 2012. This will enable the Palestinians to bring up cases of war crimes, since such status grants the right to appeal to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The PA, however, agreed not to use this tool during the period of the peace negotiations with Israel.

Only days prior to the UN decision to grant Palestine a Non-Member State Observer status, the Israeli "Operation Pillar of Defense" against militant groups in the Gaza Strip, as well as Hamas rocket fire against Israeli targets, were stopped after a ceasefire mediated by Egypt's former President, Mohamed Morsi. After the hostilities, an IPU delegation assessed the situation in Gaza in January 2013, and stressed, inter alia, that the Palestinian Legislative Council needed to be more efficient in its functions. However, this could only occur if the Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, start to co-operate together again.

One cannot overlook the grim prospect of Hamas' independent rule in the Gaza Strip. Presently, Hamas continues to stick to power after it turned away from its supporters in Syria and Iran, only to embrace Egypt's now overthrown Muslim Brotherhood rulers, including President Morsi. At present, friendless, with the exception of Turkey and Qatar, bankrupt and in spite of vanishing support at home, Hamas seems to become increasingly ruthless towards its citizens and all forms

of opposition. In addition to that, PA President Mahmoud Abbas seemed reluctant to form a joint government with Hamas.

Apart from the current challenges, there are certain notorious issues which are hindering the Peace Process and continue to pose an obstacle, such as the Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, the issue of Palestinian prisoners, as well as the Israeli separation barrier.

The Palestinian prisoners continue to be a sensitive issue in the Peace Process. In this regard, Ban Ki-moon reaffirmed the UN position that human rights must be fully respected with particular attention to all Palestinian detainees and prisoners. In light of the above, PAM appreciated the release of a number of prisoners by Israel as a goodwill gesture in connection with the present peace talks. Despite the lasting controversy in Israel, some 100 additional prisoners are to be released by April of 2014. Another noteworthy political issue is the Israeli separation barrier which has an immense impact on Palestinian daily life, for example in the form of long detours and economic losses. The barrier is contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Obviously, the international community plays an important role in the developments of the Middle East Peace Process and must continue to give it high priority. Israel needs to maintain its decisions to stop building settlements on occupied Palestinian land. Furthermore, it is vital that the international community maintains a regular dialogue with all the parties and, if necessary, exert pressure when there are breaches of international law to proceed in terms of law.

PAM participated at the UN Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Rome in February 2013 and stressed its committed cooperation with the UN in order to solve political issues related to borders and settlements, based on the two-state solution framework. The socio-economic crisis in the Gaza Strip was also discussed at the seminar. The participants called on donors to increase aid and also called on Israel to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip. It should be mentioned though that Israel already made a positive step in this direction when it eased the blockade in 2010, and also in late 2013 with the opening of the Kerem Shalom border crossing to let humanitarian aid into the Hamas-ruled territory. Following the destruction by the Egyptian military of most of the smuggling tunnels through which also oil supplies entered Gaza, the UN is currently distributing fuel to keep the infrastructure functioning. In its report, PAM stresses repeatedly the need for joint cooperation to help the Palestinians in coordination and prioritization of foreign aid.

PAM's most recent action concerning the Middle East Peace Process took place in November 2013. A PAM high-level delegation visited Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem to meet with Government and Parliamentary authorities and discuss the Middle East Peace Process, the ongoing crisis in Syria, as well as the Iran nuclear negotiations. In Amman, the delegation had

meetings with the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Judeh and the two Speakers of the Parliament and the Senate and discussed about the spill-over effects caused by the Syrian crisis. Discussions in Ramallah were held with representatives of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Dr. Hussein Al-Araj, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Bureau of H.E. Mahmoud Abbas. These discussions focused on the Peace Process as well as the delicate situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria, 200.000 of them having already fled to Lebanon. The reconciliation process between Hamas and Fatah was touched as well. In Jerusalem, PAM delegates met the Speaker of the Knesset, the Israeli delegation to PAM, as well as officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hon. Tzipi Livni, who is also in charge of the negotiations, expressed her appreciation for PAM's role in supporting this process through parliamentary diplomacy. During the talks, both Israelis and Palestinians expressed their full commitment to reach a final and comprehensive agreement. The appreciation for PAM's role as a unique platform for parliamentary diplomacy was repeated at all the meetings of the PAM mission in the Middle East. A recent report on the PAM high-level visit to the Middle East between 9 and 15 November 2013 is attached (Annex I).

PAM is continuously putting its parliamentary network at the disposal of the parties involved to facilitate negotiations and the Assembly invites its members from the Israeli and Palestinian parliaments to step up the peace dialogue to advance the Middle East Peace Process and reach a solution. From the outset, PAM fully supported the resumption of the dialogue between the parties and underlined its commitment to the two-state solution, as indicated in the road map proposed by the US Administration.

II. The Transition Process in North Africa: Libya – Tunisia – Egypt

The aftermath of the Maghreb uprisings gave hope for political stability, but at the same time concern persisted about politico-ideological polarization dragging the transition process to the opposite direction. In addition, Tunisia and Egypt are far from attaining economic prosperity and the ongoing unrest among the citizens caused by social inequalities and unemployment has complicated the situation. Furthermore, Egypt's religious minorities and women are concerned about equal rights and legal protection in terms of the draft constitution process. Despite Libya's oil resources, the country faces fundamental challenges in building a stable and transparent state apparatus due to the continued destabilization by armed militias. Consequently, the international community, when requested, should be forthcoming in assisting their needs in order to avoid regional instability and insecurity.

Libya is experiencing a challenging transition period. The citizens elected a new interim government in November 2012. It had one year to organize elections in 2013, a process that is to be based on the new constitution yet to be drafted. The previous interim government, the National Transitional Council, was criticized for soft management of the reform process and for

being ineffective, since it neither built democratic institutions nor prosecuted officials responsible for the crackdown on the opposition.

Any future Libyan Government will face great challenges, such as: establishing the Rule of Law, building institutions and disarming revolutionary groups. These armed groups refuse to hand over their weapons in the absence of security, a functional judiciary system and a legitimate government. Recently, Prime Minister Ali Zidan has established a committee to coordinate disarmament and integration of militiamen.

The transition process in Libya is very difficult and this due to several reason. First because of obstacles to reach consensus about political issues in Libya's multi-tribal society and secondly, since after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, these provincial groups demanded autonomy to form a decentralized model of governance. Clear examples of the precarious security situation are the killing of the US Ambassador to Libya by Islamists in September 2012, the attempt to kill the Italian Consul, as well as the eruption of deadly clashes between militias, civilian protestors and government forces in November 2013, which left 47 dead. This incident, which resulted in the expulsion of Misratan militia groups from Tripoli, was accompanied by a rise in public support for the government, which may be regarded as a good opportunity for Prime Minister Ali Zidan to wrest power from the militia groups.

In 2013, PAM offered support for parliamentary training sessions abroad to Libyan MPs in particular. H.E. Mohamed Emhemed Abdul-Aziz, Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs, requested PAM to assist in facilitating the path of Libya towards democracy. The Assembly moreover assists Libya in the context of the PAM Panel on Trade and Investments in the Mediterranean in encouraging investments targeting SMEs in Libya.

However, in December 2013, the surprise decision of Libya's National Assembly to base the country's legislation on the Sharia casted doubts on the democratic character of Libya's transition. This development poses a challenge to the international community's role in assisting Libya in its transition process.

In **Tunisia**, the current government, formed by the Ennahda party, decided to create a tripartite coalition with two other secular and liberal parties instead of the hard-line Salafist Nour Party. There is an ongoing debate about the role of secular and democratic ideas in an Islamic state and Ennahda plays a vital role in this debate. Ennahda spokesperson Yusra Ghannouchi in July 2013 announced that a constitutional draft version had been completed by the Constituent Assembly. Earlier, Human Rights Watch, Tunisian activists and NGOs concluded that the draft failed to affirm freedom of thought, religion and conscience and entails discriminatory elements. During the same month, protests erupted in Tunisia following the assassination of opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi. Later, in August, government forces intensified their crackdown on extremist militants in border regions, and in September there were public protests demanding

government step down. This was followed by Ennahda accepting a roadmap which envisaged: a government of technocrats; finalization of the new constitution; new electoral laws; setting of a date for elections. The powerful UGTT labour union negotiated the deal and mediated the talks. In November, government and opposition failed to agree on a Prime Minister and to form a new government through political dialogue due to rising tensions between the political parties. Outside of the parliament and within society, tensions were also running high, as violent protests against the ruling Ennahda party left 50 policemen injured.

Despite a comparably successful transition, Tunisia is however dependent on international economic assistance due to the crisis. To make things worse, Tunisia is also struggling with the collapse of its tourism sector and rising youth unemployment, which require government action and foreign support to invest in projects generating jobs. There is concern that the combination of unemployment and financial crisis will eventually cause social unrest by marginalized young citizens. Nevertheless, its relatively limited geographical scope and the general popular support for a secular political approach, give Tunisia an advantage in establishing democratic institutions based on the Rule of Law and equal civil rights.

PAM supports Tunisia in its effort to tackle the country's domestic challenges. The Assembly organized a parliamentary debate on "The Role of Parliaments in Support of the Economic Process" during a high-level meeting co-organized with UNIDO, the EC, the Tunisian Ministry of Industry and the Tunisian Agency for Investment which was held in Tunisia in November 2012 a few weeks after the Plenary Session held in Malta. Former Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Rafik Abdessalem, in a bilateral meeting with the PAM high-level delegation, pointed out that Tunisia needs economic and social support in terms of job creation, direct foreign investment and vocational training. PAM is therefore actively working to raise awareness for the needs of Tunisia.

Egypt is still experiencing a highly volatile transition process after the various popular revolts in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Political reforms are still ongoing and neither social inclusion nor government accountability were translated into reality yet. These shortcomings are a major challenge also due to revenue losses as a consequence of the turmoil.

The Islamist victory in Egypt's first post-Hosni Mubarak election caused fear among liberals and non-Muslims about the influence of religion in Egypt's political transition. Another issue that came up in 2012 and caused popular unrest was former President Mohamed Morsi's questionable constitutional reform to extend his power. The drafting process of the constitution and its content did cause further political instability. It was criticized for not representing all Egyptian people, such as women, non-Muslims and liberals.

In June and July 2013, the tense political situation in Egypt escalated once more and some of the aforementioned fears were overturned by the rapidly unfolding events. After massive protests against Egypt's rulers, President Mohamed Morsi was removed from office and replaced by Chief Justice Adly Mansour as Interim President. In the aftermath of these events, pro- and con-Morsi camps clashed violently in the streets. Later, the military appeared to broaden its campaign and stamped down on dissidents in general. Following a court order, the Brotherhood was dissolved. Most recently, clashes erupted again between Brotherhood supporters and the army. The UN Secretary-General condemned the violence and underlined the importance of democratic transition to which Egyptian authorities have committed themselves. The US decided to reduce its assistance to Egypt, as a result of which Egypt initiated strategic talks with Russia.

In early December, a committee of 50, headed by former Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and former Egyptian Foreign Minister, H.E. Amr Moussa, completed its work on a new constitution, which will be submitted to popular referendum in early 2014.

In conclusion, in order to facilitate long-term national stability in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, PAM and the international community are ready to assist these countries to improve the democratic processes, establishing regional partnership and trade agreements, with specific focus on foreign investment.

III. Political and Legal Reforms in Morocco and Jordan

For the past two years, the unrest in the Arab world increased expectations for more political and social reforms among the region's population. The kings of Jordan and Morocco responded to these demands by implementing timely democratic measures.

King Abdullah II of **Jordan** made some constitutional reforms resulting in limitations on the government in favour of Parliament, as well as the establishment of a constitutional court and an independent institution to supervise the elections. Public freedoms in Jordan have also been strengthened. PAM was invited to Jordan to assist in monitoring the national elections in January 2013. The conclusion of PAM's mission to Jordan was that the election system and process were fair and in line with international standards.

Also **Morocco** reformed its constitution. Amendments include inter alia the granting of more executive powers to the Prime Minister, who is to be chosen from the largest party in parliament, and the recognition of Tamazight as an official language. The king is to remain Head of State, and also head military and religious authorities.

Both Morocco and Jordan have made great efforts to strengthen the Rule of Law. Indeed, public pressure helped in political and social reforms aimed at stabilizing their societies and at

increasing the credibility of elections and institutions. These are political steps which are highly appreciated and supported by PAM. From an economic point of view, these countries still suffer from high youth unemployment, which presents tremendous challenges for the near future.

IV. PAM and the Humanitarian Situation in Syria

The Syrian crisis, which sparked in March 2011, has cost the lives of more than 110.000 people. Various international organizations have been trying to find a solution to the bloodletting in the civil war country. The spillover effect of the conflict in Syria, has caused a critical situation at the border areas with neighbouring countries, where some refugee camps lack adequate support, such as water, sanitation and sanitary services and medical treatment.

From 28 June to 2 July 2013, PAM fielded a mission to Syria and Lebanon in order to address issues related to aid delivery, humanitarian access and national reconciliation. In Damascus, PAM delegates met with representatives of the UN as well as Syrian MPs. The MPs were urged to reduce the level of violence, scale up protection of civilian population and enhance conditions for humanitarian aid. One of the major problems observed by PAM was the lack of good communication between humanitarian agencies and the Syrian Government. PAM proposed that frequent meetings between humanitarian agencies and the Syrian National High Relief Committee could be a step to address this problem. During consultations, issues related to the problematic arms supply to any of the conflict parties by outside actors, the sanctions against Syria which pose an obstacle to an improvement of the humanitarian situation, attacks on UN convoys, as well as detentions and interrogations of political activists were picked out as central themes. It should moreover be noted that during PAM's visit in Syria, the delegation took the opportunity to strengthen the communication between international key actors by transmitting messages from the EU to the Syrian Government.

During the visit, it became clear that there was consensus about the notion that the crisis will not be resolved by military means and that direct political negotiations are needed. However, PAM understood that in order to increase the number of political options, which can be discussed during future meetings, confidence building measures were a necessary step. Such measures could include amnesties as well as freedom of speech and movement for opposition leaders. It should be mentioned that Syrian MPs reacted positively to the EU Joint Communication which addressed the crisis objectively. Furthermore, it should be noted that the PAM Parliamentary Hearing, which was supposed to take place in Amman at the end of October 2013, was agreed upon during this mission. Indeed, this planned meeting could have been considered to be a step towards further cooperation with the UN since it was requested by the International Envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, and UN agencies.

Unfortunately, due to the dissolution of the Jordanian Senate the meeting in Amman did not take place. However, in October 2013 on the occasions of the Autumn Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE in Montenegro, PAM and the OSCE joined forces in calling for a solution of the Syrian crisis. In a similar step occurred on the occasion of the 59th Annual Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, at which PAM participated. During this session a resolution was made to call for an increase of humanitarian aid to the countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees. The same appeal for more support to refugee host countries is echoed by UNHCR. Additionally, the UN confirmed that more than 3 million people to date fled the country.

It is worth highlighting that PAM continuously liaised with Syrian parliamentarians ahead of its mission to Syria. The Assembly has been in direct contact with H.E. the Speaker of the Syrian Parliament since representatives met with the Syrian delegation in the context of the IPU General Assembly in Quito, Ecuador, in March 2013. The Syrian government informed the PAM Secretary-General during PAM's visit to Damascus that they are committed to solve the crises with the involved parties.

As a final comment on the mission to Syria, it should be highlighted that PAM representatives met with H.E. Azamat Kulmuhametov, Russian Ambassador to Syria. In the meeting, it became clear that Russia was experiencing several problems in delivering humanitarian aid similar to those experienced by the UN. PAM Secretary-General encouraged cooperation between Russia and the UN on this issue. A recent report on the PAM Mission to Syria and Lebanon from 28 June to 2 July 2013 is attached (Annex II).

PAM's efforts to make use of international fora in order to address the Syrian crisis did not stop there. During PAM's last mission to the Middle East in November 2013, PAM delegates met with key officials in Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem and the Syrian crisis was at the top of the agenda. During this visit, it became obvious that there is broad consensus among regional powers concerning many issues related to the civil war in Syria. For example, all powers agree that Syria should stay unified, that a political solution is the only way to solve the crisis and of course that the humanitarian crisis must be addressed fully.

Another aspect of the Syrian crisis is that humanitarian workers and medical staff face massive security problems in the field. Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) volunteers and UN staff members were killed and UN vehicles came often under attack. PAM and participants at the 5+5 parliamentary meeting in Nouakchott 2013 called on Syria to assume its responsibilities, such as protecting civilians and delivering humanitarian assistance to all victims of the conflict. The Nouakchott declaration states moreover that participants support the parliamentary diplomacy initiative called for by the UN and launched by PAM. It was concluded in Nouakchott that a parallel channel for communication with Syria shall be established, with the purpose to engage

the Syrian Parliament and increase the safety of both the victims of the conflict and the humanitarian workers in Syria. PAM is working together with the UN to facilitate a solution for the current unsustainable humanitarian situation.

In view of viable paths towards a solution to the humanitarian issues and the crisis in general, PAM supported Russia's peace initiative as one of the most promising recent proposals for a political solution of the ongoing conflict. In a letter to the Russian Foreign Ministry, PAM invited H.E. Sergej Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to participate at the High-Level Regional Parliamentary Hearing on the Crisis in Syria and its humanitarian implications, which was supposed to take place in Amman in November 2013. This meeting could have been a forum for Russia to illustrate the Syria initiative to parliamentarians but due to unforeseen circumstances it did not take place.

An additional good example of PAM's active role in the context of the Syrian crisis is the facilitating role it played in order to enable female parliamentarians from Syria to attend the 2013 Annual Summit of the "Women in Parliaments Global Forum" which took place at the European Parliament in Brussels from 27 to 29 November. On that occasion, a bilateral meeting was organised with the office of Ms. Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU.

Also other international organizations put effort to address the various humanitarian issues which are mounting in major host countries. The UN and the EU have acted upon the refugee crisis amongst others by financially supporting Syria's neighbors. The UN is helping displaced refugees by assisting neighboring countries, and the EU has provided Lebanon with additional funds in order to handle the Syrian humanitarian crisis. According to UNHCR, the number of internally displaced persons is estimated to stand at more than 5 million by late 2013. In addition, especially Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey are experiencing a massive influx of refugees. PAM was present at the launch of the "2013 Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan" (SHARP) at the UN in Geneva. This \$1.5 billion "SHARP" aid package is directly destined to assist Syrian refugees and displaced people. It is based on UN Resolution 46/182 "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations", adopted at the 78th General Assembly Plenary Meeting in 1991. The United States has provided an additional \$100 million to aid Syrian refugees and the USAID has donated wheat to the United Nations World Food Program. However, Secretary of State, John Kerry, added that *"the solution to this crisis is not more humanitarian assistance. In the end, it is a political solution that reduces the humanitarian crisis itself"*.

Another noteworthy initiative at the level of international decision-making was the London 11 Final Communiqué from October 2012. In this agreement, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

welcome the UN decision to endorse the formation of a Syrian Transitional Governing Body with full executive powers, based on the Geneva Communiqué and to be reached through the Geneva II Conference. Furthermore, the group of countries highlights that Assad must not play a role in Syria after the formation for a transitional body and calls to step up humanitarian support as well as support to the major refugee host countries. The London 11 moreover condemn the violence, especially the use of chemical weapons, from the side of the Assad forces, and pledge to support the Syrian opposition's National Council.

This accusation goes back to April 2013, when international attention was drawn to Syria with Western states accusing the regime of using chemical weapons against civilians in the suburbs of Damascus. As a consequence, the likelihood of a US-led military intervention seemed to increase with military vessels deployed in the region preparing for action. However, the military scenario did not unfold and key actors, including the Assad Government, agreed on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons under international supervision, based on a proposal by Russia. The first chemical weapons inspectors arrived in Syria in October 2013. At the end of November, a plan to destroy the chemical weapons on the US Navy auxiliary vessel MV Cape Ray in the Mediterranean was drawn up.

A very recent development, which should not remain unmentioned, is a telephone conversation, in which King Abdullah II of Jordan ensured President Bashar al-Assad that Jordan will try to stay out of the conflict and prevent border infiltrations by militias from its territory. Back then, there was disagreement between the UN and the LAS about the date of future negotiations.

Finally, in late November 2013, PAM welcomed the decision by the Syrian Government and the opposition to meet for negotiations at the Geneva II conference on 22 January 2014 and congratulated H.E. Lakhdar Brahimi, the US and Russia for their efforts in this direction. During a briefing on this matter, Lakhdar Brahimi, International Envoy to Syria, clarified that he considers the goal of Geneva II to be the implementation of the conclusions of Geneva I. The envoy moreover expressed his hope that prisoner releases and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance will be implemented as confidence-building measures. Only days before this intended meeting between the conflict parties was announced by the UN Secretary-General, the Iranian Embassy was devastated in a bombing attack in Beirut, a violent act which was strongly condemned by PAM.

V. Conclusion

Parts of North Africa are currently unsettled due to economic crises, ideological polarization, youth unemployment and lack of security. The Middle East is in a state of political upheaval with the future of the Middle East Peace Process uncertain and a worsening conflict in Syria, which has resulted in a refugee and humanitarian crisis.

Regarding the Middle East Peace Process, PAM calls on all parties to prioritize the issue and supports the US efforts to reach an agreement. Furthermore, it is important that Egypt continues its mediation efforts for reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. An important development was the UN decision to grant the Palestinians Non-Member State Observer status. During the mission to the Middle East, PAM had the opportunity to meet with high-ranking officials in Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem and discuss the Peace Process, the Syrian crisis, as well as the Iranian negotiations. The conclusions of the visit to the Middle East were discussed with the UN Secretary- General and other UN senior officials on the occasion of a PAM high-level mission to New York on 3 to 7 December 2013, the report of which is attached (Annex III). Based on the consultations in New York, in the future PAM will continue to extend its full support to the Middle East negotiations through its parliamentary network and instruments of parliamentary diplomacy.

The transition period in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt offers a unique opportunity to implement universal political and social rights, regardless of religious, ethnic and political affiliation. However, these countries require technical support. Egypt and Tunisia are in need of both economic aid and help to attract foreign investors who could lift them out of their financial crisis. Joint efforts to fight youth unemployment are urgent, for example by facilitating job creation projects and entrepreneurship seminars.

PAM appreciates that the kings in Jordan and Morocco reacted to the demands of their citizens by implementing democratic measures, for instance through constitutional reforms and strengthening the Rule of Law. PAM assisted in monitoring the general elections in Jordan in 2013 and drew positive conclusions.

It is important that the international community unites in a time of uncertainty and instability in order to jointly discuss solutions to common issues in the socio-economic and political field. PAM's inter-parliamentary actions in the case of Syria have its foundation in the notion of human rights and the Rule of Law; therefore, it is of high priority to find a solution so that Syrians can benefit from universal human rights and to hold the regime accountable. During PAM's mission to Syria, the communication gap between the Syrian Government and humanitarian organizations was recognized by PAM as one of the most daring issues yet to be resolved.

All of these social, economical and political challenges in the MENA region are PAM priorities. It is equally important to negotiate a peaceful co-existence between Israel and an independent Palestine based on the two-state solution. Likewise, it is significant for PAM to be engaged in the democratic transition in North Africa by assisting its members in the process of building stable and effective institutions. PAM encourages its members to engage in inter-parliamentary talks, to

endorse the confidence in the democratic process and replicate the importance of exchanging expertise in order to move the transition process forward.