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Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

Libya: Re-establishing the State

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25 May 2012

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Sir Richard Dalton:

Ladies and Gentlemen, you are all very welcome. My name is Richard Dalton, and it's my honour to welcome the Prime Minister of Libya, Dr Abdurrahim El-Keib, to Chatham House.

Dr El-Keib was elected by the National Transitional Council on the 31 October 2011. Before that, he was a member of the National Transitional Council, representing Tripoli. Earlier, he served for several decades as a professor of electrical engineering, being a prominent expert in electrical power engineering.

At Chatham House, we have followed Libya's progress since February 2011 with great attention and with great sympathy. Few roles can be more difficult than that of interim Prime Minister. There are so many problems at the end of the conflict; there are such expectations. Institutions are inevitably weak, and consensus on big issues is inevitably hard to find. Dr El-Keib gained a reputation early in his membership of the National Transitional Council as a consensus builder. I would like to invite him to speak on the subject of 'Re-establishing the Libyan State'.

Thank you.

Dr Aburrahim El-Keib:

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. I thank the Chatham House institution and Sir Richard, and his staff members in organizing this meeting. It is indeed a pleasure to be with you here this morning.

As you well know, Libya is quite a rich country with its natural resources; a vast country that was ruled by a tyrant named Muammar Gaddafi. When we took office, humbly, Libya was in a state of devastation on all levels. During the last four decades, there was no civil society as we all know it; no political parties, no free press, nothing of that sort. Libya was a country where Libyans felt like aliens. As a result of low wages, very low wages, unemployment of over 30%, and lack of opportunities, Libyans lived as close as you can get to the poverty line. Libyans always lived in fear from the security apparatus that never hesitated in committing abuses, and serious ones, against those who dare[d] to criticize the regime.

We inherited a state in which apart [from] the name of Gaddafi, no one's name was supposed to be mentioned. A country where corruption and lack of transparency were endemic; and the complete absence of any institution in most sectors. The few institutions that existed require huge, huge reforms.

We took office humbly. In our country, a country where its education and health systems had collapsed. Its infrastructure was minimal if any. A country in which most cities lacked internet. In addition to that, the severe shortage of local currency was amazing. Added to that, the devastation resulting from our struggle for freedom, and the needs of the Libyan people – and we are talking about the must have – and how to integrate the revolutionaries into the civil society and back to normal life. How to implement equality and respect human rights in the most extraordinary circumstances. But we took office because we strongly believed that we have to do that.

It is important for us to make sure that security and stability are ensured, and to organize the elections for the general national council [sic] in an atmosphere of security, freedom, certainly transparency, and integrity. There is no doubt that the challenges that face a government, or an eight month transitional government, are numerous; but we decided to take them on. But I can say that we, under these circumstances, have been making excellent progress. Thank God. And we are making that progress continuously towards democracy and rule of law.

In the area of stability, for example, the government has put in place a serious program for disarmament and to merge the revolutionary in the state's institution [sic]. It undertook many measures regarding controlling the weapons of mass destruction and many other weapons. All this has been achieved in cooperation with the Libyan civil societies, the United Nations, specialized international organizations, and friendly nations and partners, such as the UK.

In this context, we called for a regional conference concerning border security, which was held in Libya on 11 and 12 March this year. The ministers of interior and defence in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Chad, Niger, Mali, and Egypt; of course, their counterparts from Libya participated. This was a serious conference, where we discussed the security challenges, including illegal immigration, cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs. The conference also discussed how to deal with the remnants of the Gaddafi regime that still are, unfortunately, operating freely in some countries and represent an on-going threat to the security of Libya and the region in general. In order to enhance stability, the act of transitional justice and an amnesty law have been passed. Both laws aimed to achieve justice, national reconciliation, and social harmony.

In the framework of achieving justice and our fight against impunity, the transitional government has been committed, and working diligently to

enhance respect for human rights through a combination of procedures that include: the general handover of prisons to the judicial police; spreading the culture of human rights among those assigned to implement the laws; and the regular monitoring of prisons. We actually have formed a ministerial committee chaired by the Minister of Justice to lead this effort.

Preparations are underway to elect next June the General National Council that is tasked with drafting the constitution. The electoral laws were passed. The High National Election Commission was established and is working diligently. More than 2.5 – I believe, approximately – Libyans have registered to vote. Work is continuing in order to complete the final preparations so that the elections will be held on time. Because institutions are the foundations, as we all know, for state building, development and progress, the government has made this one of its main objectives.

The different ministers have begun, or have been working on constructing and implementing their plans, and the reform of both education and health sectors, as well as invigorating the economy, is one of the issues that tops the government agenda. I am not going to hold you too long, but I will be happy to listen to you.

Thank you very much.