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An Emerging Morocco in a Changing Regional Environment

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AN EMERGING MOROCCO IN A CHANGING REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction: Dr Claire Spencer

It gives me huge pleasure to welcome back to Chatham House His Excellency Taïb Fassi Fihri who, I have printed out a copy of the programme we ran in 2006 on 'Justice, Reconciliation and Human-Based Development', a conference we held here at that time at which the Minister very kindly came to speak, and it reminds me of the example that Morocco was then giving in terms of new ways of dealing not only with its present and its future but also its past.

And so obviously we've all been struck at the wonderful timing of this meeting not only because as we see in London there is heightened interest in developments across the North Africa region but because of the momentous speech that His Majesty Mohammed VI gave yesterday about constitutional reform and new developments in Morocco.

So I won't pre-empt what the Minister will say about this but I think this is an extraordinarily timely occasion to be hearing his views and I know he's already been kept busy today commenting on this and answering questions on it. He will be speaking on-the-record and then we will have a *Question and Answer* session which will also be on-the-record.

H E Taïb Fassi Fihri:

I want just to express how I am very proud to be here once again talking with you in this direct dialogue, frank dialogue, without taboo and to be concrete I want to talk with you this afternoon about what happened around us in the Arab world and how could this Arab spring evaluate and give better life, better future to people of my region and also to share with you some comments about the Moroccan experience, Moroccan itinerary, taking note of all this evolution and also trying to continue our domestic process as we start since the independence in this permanent evolution giving the possibility for people to participate to its life and to their investment in the society.

If I may just raise some assessments first: What happened in Tunisia - and I am very happy to meet my friend, another old friend, the Ambassador of the new Tunisia in England - and in Egypt, in Yemen or in Libya saying first that there is no possibility for any society to progress if it didn't progress on its two legs. The first leg - economic development, sure; social progress, sure - but in parallel, with in the same dynamic on political and democratic leg. The

second assessment is that even if there is economic growth in our countries, this result of this growth has to be shared by all, at the social level but also at the territorial level. The third assessment is that what happened with all the respect to the leadership of this country is that maybe the leadership maintain itself too much time and what maybe was creating some frustration is that at the time – once again with my respect to this country, to its people – at the time when President Ben Ali was re-elected in November 2009, two months after some people took the initiative to receive some signature to ask former President Ben Ali to be a candidate for 2014 and then maybe create some frustration for people saying that we have the same President since many decades and we will have the same President ten years more.

Egypt is the same, presenting one Crown Prince when President Hosni Mubarak decided to be a candidate for the elections in September 2011 and here too created some frustration for the people of Egypt, even with the son; that the army will accept the son, that people will accept the son.

We can talk also about Yemen in the same context, then it's too long a time as head of state and some frozen perspective for the next years.

Libya. We can say the same thing but with more strong detail; that in Libya there is not only one Crown Prince, there are four, and here too the people in Libya start to say if it's possible to maintain the society under the same umbrella, the same vision without state, without sector *[inaudible]* of state and with one chemistry coming from the leadership.

The fourth assessment is that from time to time I heard and I read that what the Arab world is living now is like what happened in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 and it showed that there are some similarities between the two experiences but what is sure is that we cannot compare 100% what happened in Europe and what is going on in the Arab world. Why? First because all Eastern European countries have the same rules or game and the same regime - Soviet regime – and when the USSR and when Berlin was collapsed then automatically the domino effect worked in a short time because it's due to the same regime we had at this time in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, in Rumania, in Bulgaria.

The Arab world is totally different. There is no Arab country that has the same political regime than another. I want to be very clear here. In the Arab world we share the same challenges. In the Arab world we are facing the same problems and the name of these problems are employment of youth, are corruption, are justice, are lack of transparency, are lack of hope for people. But each country can evaluate or continue to evaluate because we

cannot compare the situation in Mauritania with the situation in Jordan, as we cannot compare the situation in Bahrain with the situation in Tunisia, as we cannot compare the situation in Algeria with the situation in Emirates. And in this context Morocco said/the government said we have to listen, we have to follow what happens in our region but what is sure is that each country can positively appropriate and resolve all these issues, it depends on political will and of the mechanism and the instrument, how we listen to the voice of the people and how we can use all these channels between the leadership and population, not only in parliament but also some specific other channels or regulatory agencies.

What happened also in Europe is totally different because these countries were accompanied by the members of the same family. They were accompanied by European Union in terms of expertise, in terms of financial support, in terms of security matters. They were accompanied by the Council of European on political and judiciary things. They were accompanied by Nato on security matters and they were accompanied by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. But more than that, they were also accompanied by the USA. And then this collective effort helped these countries, some better than others, to realise their transition – we even continue to talk about transition in a country like Ukraine today and I hope tomorrow in Byelorussia – but they were accompanied by this collective, sharing the same values but also supporting in terms of economic subsidies and expertise.

Unfortunately in our region we have not the same. We have not this umbrella like the Arab League and the Arab League talks a lot about the Israeli-Arab conflict but each country has its own vision for the future of the integration in the Arab League. If there is no integration then no-one can help and there is no crisis management system to manage a specific crisis and situation in the Arab League.

Worse, even if a sub-regional integration process exists like in the Maghreb, this integration is not still today clear and there is also a lack of confidence between the five countries of the Maghreb Arab Union.

And then in this specific context I can say – maybe I'm wrong – that there will be no domino effect in the Arab vision even if we are faced with the same challenges and problems and issues. Second, what is called today the Arab spring, we hope all here that it can be followed by an Arab summer. But you know the Arabs from time to time they can go forward and then they go directly to a dark winter. Why do I say that? First because we have some

experience. Remember Iran in 1979 when the Shah left Tehran. Shapur Bakhtiar wasn't here as President *[inaudible]* offering a real democracy for the country and then some problems appears and then the Islamists were welcomed and the autocrat revolution happened. It will not be the same in Egypt, Tunisia or tomorrow in Libya we hope. But there are some risks, why? For the first time in our history one alliance between extreme left, internet surfers, young people and Islamists happened. Together in *Casbah* or in *Plas Tahrir* and in this alliance some people who maybe were not well known – youth but also extreme left by people – the Islamists were more discreet, first because the party is not official and they decide to be discreet for two reasons. First to not threaten the population and the West and second, to give to them time to prepare the elections and they decide in Tunisia and Mhada in Egypt, the Muslim Brothers, to not only to be discreet but to say to all the world we change - we are not terrorists, we are not jihadists and we change the Sharia by justice and we change the jihad by development. It's the name of this party, Nahda like in Turkey, justice and development.

And I know that very many diplomats and politicians are very interested by this experience in Turkey and we take note that this Islamist movement take account of this experience in Turkey and they will integrate this experience in their own vision and activities.

In all in this global context I want to share with you and talk about Morocco saying first that immediately after our independence the people of Morocco reject the single party. It was not easy and it took many years, from 1956 to 1960. We have one party saying I represent all people because I am the nationalist party but this party was devised and others said, no – you don't represent us *[inaudible]*. After some years we decide as people to also avoid the possibility for a military dictator and we *[inaudible]* for that and we refuse as people that at the moment where some other experience in the Arab world appears. Who will be the son of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the nationalist Arab *[inaudible]*? We avoided also and we fight against this possibility. Then we have a constitution in 1962 and the reform of the constitution is not a taboo. We decide the amendment of the constitution five times and yesterday for the sixth time. Then we are in continuity, confirming the main options and taking account of the evolution of Moroccan people and our *[inaudible]*.

What it was announced yesterday is an historical new step for Morocco, first because it's a result of a process started one year ago. In Morocco we decide to implement an advanced regionalization because we believe that Morocco has the capacity to manage an advanced regionalization without any risk in terms of dismantling our territory and the committee presented to His

Majesty two tracks for that; one to go directly to the advanced regionalization and the second is to go slowly, progressively, and in connection with all political parties His Majesty decided to select the first track, to implement immediate advanced regionalization. What does this mean? It means not only the transfer of the decisions from Rabat to 10 or 12 regions but it means that the home department will give local decision to elect directly elected people as leader of a region with an electoral body using the financial possibilities for the benefit for the people.

But what was maybe more important than when the King selected this accelerated and immediate evolution, listening once again, taking note of the evolution of the country, the request of political parties, the request of the NGOs, the request of the trade unions and all the civil society, then His Majesty said: OK, we decided that last year but now maybe it's a good opportunity to go forward with the advanced regionalization and take this opportunity to have a constitutional reform open to all fields and issues. The role of the executive government, the competences of parliament, the separation and the independence of the justice, the possibility to update the competences of many bodies like the Economic and Social Council and I think that it was well received by all political parties in Morocco including the youth, internet surfers, saying that we ask for the same thing and now this evolution will be prepared by a technical committee in strong connection and strong dialogue with political parties, NGOs, trade unions, civil society and this effort has to be finalised at the end of June. Historical reform, important reform, ownership reform, open reform, audacious but serene reform - I hope that all Moroccans will be happy to live under the umbrella of the next constitution in Morocco.

Saying that, I have to remind that it's not something new. In Morocco we just talk about this experience to look to the past on human-rights issues and how Morocco did at specific and unique *[inaudible]* experience in the Arab world to fight against poverty or to avoid more disparities between each area in Morocco.