

Head of the United Nations in Libya, Ian Martin, Visits Al-Zawiya

By Randa Jamal

During a one day visit to Al-Zawiya, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ian Martin met with members of the Local, Military, and *Shura* Councils, in addition to the Union of Revolutionaries, civil society organizations and activists. The SRSR engaged in open discussions to listen to concerns and clarify the role of the United Nations as mandated by Security Council resolution 2009 (2011).

Martin maintained that UN technical assistance and expertise will only be provided if requested, as the "The UN is here with full respect for the capacity of Libyans and for Libyan sovereignty". "We're not going to tell you how to do it but offer examples from experience elsewhere - it's up to you to choose which way may be useful."



Al-Zawiya, 10 November 2011 (UNSMIL Photo/Iason)

The needs of children and the traumatic experience they suffered during the revolution were highlighted in the discussions, in addition to needs for reconstruction and improvement of basic infrastructure for economic recovery. How to ensure that all get to participate in political and civic life was a topic of significance, especially to the youth and women who attended the sessions. Overall, the transitional period was the central theme throughout the discussions: moving from a dictatorship into a full-fledged democracy, the impediments and ways of overcoming the challenges.



SRSR Ian Martin during a meeting with members of Civil Society in Al-Zawiya (UNSMIL Photo/Iason)

During the day, Mr. Martin, along with his team, paid a visit to the centre of the city, Martyrdom Square, where military battles were fierce, leaving scores of civilians dead and many more injured. Nearby, the destruction of an entire mosque occurred, civilians and revolutionaries were killed and buried, a hospital was bombed while housing hundreds of those wounded. An exhibition tells the story.

In a room packed with photos of the martyrs, along with a display of the weaponry used against civilians in the city, Members of the Revolutionary and Local Councils spoke of the plight of those who were killed and the sacrifices they made: "To these martyrs we are forever indebted", one of Al-Zawiya residents said. Listening to each story and viewing the photos, Mr. Martin wrote in the signature visitor's book, "this room bears witness to the sacrifices committed by your people for the cause of attaining freedom and human rights. They must always be remembered in building the new Libya".

Members of his UN delegation with expertise in rule of law and human rights visited two detention centers located on the outskirts of the city at the invitation of the authorities.



*SRSG Ian Martin in Al-Zawiya's Martyrdom Square
(UNSMIL Photo/Iason)*

The UN established a political mission in Libya in September 2011 to support the country's new transitional authorities in their post-conflict efforts. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) is mandated to support the Libyan-led transition and rebuilding process aimed at establishing a democratic, independent and united Libya at the request of the Libyan authorities.

SRSG Ian Martin visited Al-Zawiya on Thursday, 10 November 2011.