

Address of Mr. Ian Martin
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya
On the Occasion of International Human Rights Day
The University of Tripoli
Libya
10 December 2011

“The spirit of democracy and human rights is alive in Libya!”

Thank you Dr. Abouda for your welcome.
Thank you Dr. Kindier for your commitment to human rights within the University.
Students of the University of Tripoli,

I have the privilege of being head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Let me tell you a little about our mission. We have three main areas of support to your transition to democracy and the path to democratic elections. First we are provided international expertise to the electoral process. Second, we are supporting your efforts to ensure public security. And third, we are assisting your efforts to protect human rights and support transitional justice.

I have also worked in an international human rights NGO. I was the Secretary-General of Amnesty International at a time when Amnesty was following and reporting on serious human rights violations taking place in Libya, including political killings and torture under the Qadhafi regime.

And so it means a lot to me to be here in Tripoli on the first International Human Rights Day since Libya embarked upon a revolution based on the demand that human rights must be respected. It really is a privilege for me and my colleagues to share this special day with you.

Every 10 December, we celebrate around the world the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1948. On this day we reaffirm the universality of human rights: that every man, woman and child throughout the world has the same rights and freedoms - freedom of speech and belief, freedom from want and fear.

I know that today many of you are remembering those who have been killed in recent months, as well as those who died, disappeared or were tortured during the past 40 years, so that you may live in freedom today. We must also remember today those in the Arab region and the world who are still fighting for their rights, and still becoming victims. We are all indebted to those who have gone before us who made sacrifices so that we all may live in a better world.

As students and citizens of a Free Libya, you are tomorrow's leaders. It is through you that the torch of hope and optimism – felt across Libya and inspirational across the world – is to be carried forward, to ensure an enduring and just peace throughout Libya, where human rights, security and development are enjoyed by all. It is a great responsibility that you bear.

As law students today and lawyers of tomorrow - prosecutors, defenders, and judges – yours will be an even heavier responsibility. It will be a crucial role in ensuring a society in which the rule of law is upheld, a society in which

everyone is equal before the law, a society in which the law is predictably and fairly applied.

So how can you ensure that the principles of human rights for which many of you fought, and many others died, become embedded in a Libyan culture of human rights?

I would like to offer you six ideas.

First, to maximize your efforts, I encourage you to work closely with other students across the country, so that you can learn from each other's experience and help create a national human rights movement.

Second, please reach out to other young people who do not enjoy the same access to educational opportunities as you do. Help strengthen the potential of these young people by making them aware of their rights, and grow a national human rights movement that covers all villages, towns and cities of Libya. No village should be left behind from the fruits of this human rights revolution.

Third, whilst you reach across the country, reach across borders too so that you can learn and support each other. You are an inspiration to many in the region. In other countries, people are looking to understand how you carried out your revolution. They will be looking too to see how you will secure the fruits of the revolution for all.

Fourth, ensure in all of your activities that you are supporting minority groups and other disadvantaged or vulnerable groups. Be active in including them and fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace; they all belong to Libya.

Fifth, put the protection and promotion of women's rights at the heart of the national human rights movement. Ensure that women are provided with the same opportunities as men; recognize the potential of women and ensure that they are treated as equal partners.

And, finally, respect for human rights is about dignity, tolerance and understanding, and these have to be made a daily reality. It is about ensuring a fair and transparent process in the election of the University's Students Union just as much as in the National Assembly. Your challenge is to bring respect for human rights home, as well as to spread it throughout the country.

Dear Students,

As tomorrow's leaders, please ensure that the human rights principles that founded your revolution are reflected in all your efforts and actions, so that the torch of hope and optimism will continue to burn brightly in these halls, classrooms and libraries in the years to come. The United Nations is here in Libya to support the advancement of human rights, but the challenge and the responsibility are yours.

Thank you once again for letting us bet with you on this day.