

Statement of Mr. Ian Martin
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya
One Voice Conference
11 November 2011
Tripoli

Representatives of the National Transitional Council, representatives of the Tripoli Local Council, ladies and gentlemen, organizers and volunteers,

It is a privilege to be with you as you launch the first nationwide conference for women in the new Libya.

I have now been in Tripoli, with my team, for nearly two months. We are learning, and our impressions are still forming.

But one impression has been with me since the beginning of my work on Libya, and has deepened as I have heard the voices of women in Tripoli and Benghazi, Misrata and yesterday Zawiyah: the strength of Libyan women.

I have been impressed by your determination to say what you want - and what you don't want - in the new Libya.

I have been struck by your creative responses to changing expectations regarding the role and contribution of women after the great role you have played in Libya's revolution.

And I have been humbled by the self-worth and pride you draw from your culture, tradition, customs and religion.

These strengths are in part responsible for creating the optimism and excitement that we feel – that I feel – in the air of Libyan life.

Other post-conflict experiences indicate, however, that this post-revolutionary excitement will dampen and disappear unless people continue to experience practical changes in their daily lives.

From what women have said to me and my team, changes are required that enable women to exercise their civil and political rights and contribute more to political and public life; that facilitate greater and equal access to economic opportunities; that provide women with more information on issues affecting their health and the health of their families and which provide improved access to and quality of healthcare; and that strengthen the capacity of the media as an actor to promote women's rights.

As you well know, this will take time to happen.

As you consider these key issues over the course of the next few days, I want to leave with you five thoughts which come from my experience of working in very different post-conflict countries.

First, I would encourage you to recognize and exploit the roles, experiences and energies of both young and older Libyans. The young bring their incredible energy, vision and dynamism. Older people have experience and wisdom to share. Acting together, this is a powerful combination.

Second, ensuring that the revolution brings freedom for all will require extra, targeted outreach efforts to those outside of major communities. This includes people – in particular women – living in rural areas, and other marginalized groups. I hope that your efforts will bring them into an ever-broadening circle of opportunity

Third, some capacity building of women may be useful at both the individual and organizational level to maximize your strengths and deliver your potential. You are a highly educated and capable female population; build on this and be clear in identifying what kind of support you require and from whom you do – or don't - want it.

Fourth, strategise on how you can optimize your participation in ongoing political, electoral and transitional justice processes. Research key issues, learning from other contexts; identify allies and areas of agreement; and form a common platform recognizing that your voices are loudest when joined with others.

Fifth, work together. Strengthen each other. Women are usually better than men in avoiding unnecessary competition against each other. Band together to brave the social and cultural challenges to public life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke during his visit last week of the importance of the role of civil society in general, of women and youth in particular, and of his hope to see women more actively engaged in Libyan life, in particular in the political and economic spheres. Our team is here to work with you, and the United Nations wishes you and this conference well.