

President Bashar Al Assad's 2012 Damascus University Speech

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DAMASCUS, (SANA)_ H.E. President Bashar Al-Assad delivered on Tuesday before noon a speech at Damascus University Auditorium covering domestic issues in Syria as well as local and regional conditions' developments.

President Al-Assad reiterated in his speech Syria's determination to continue the ongoing process of reforms, whose results are known before hand, citing some of the measures and steps taken to this effect including the abrogation of emergency law, authorization for parties, local administration elections, information law, elections law, and the under-discussion anti-corruption law.

President Al-Assad declared that the new constitution is to be soon put into popular referendum, citing some aspects of the constitution as to include 'political and party pluralism', 'the people are the source of power especially through elections'.

The President welcomed an expansion of the government as to include all political forces and national opposition and pointed out to the importance of dialogue.

The second to none priority for Syrians is the restoration of security and fighting terrorism with an iron fist, outlined President Al-Assad hailing the Syrians' steadfastness and awareness.

President Al-Assad underlined that no orders were given to shoot at the citizens and that no cover-up for any person would be given.

President Al-Assad cited in his speech some aspects of the conspiracy hatched against Syria, including the failing media war, blasting the role played by some Arabs as to pave the way for foreign interference in the Syrian affairs.

The President spoke of the Syrian long experience with elected parliaments, parties highlighting the Syrian Arab role in the Arab League, whose Arabism is to be suspended without the participation of Syria, in reference to the decision taken by the League of Arab States to suspend Syria's participation.

The full text of the speech:

I know that I have been away from the media for a long time, and I have missed having

direct contact with the citizens, but I have always been following up with the daily occurrences and gathering the information so that my speech can be built on what is said by the street.

I would like to salute you in the name of pan-Arabism which will continue to be a symbol of our identity and our haven in difficult times, as we will continue to be its heart beating with love and affection. I would also like to greet you in the name of our home country which will always be the source of our pride and dignity, as we will remain faithful to its genuine values for which our fathers and grandfathers sacrificed dearly to keep the country glorified and independent. And I am proud of your steadfastness which will keep Syria an invincible fortress in the face of all forms of penetration, and free in resisting submission to foreign forces.

Today, I am addressing you ten months after the outbreak of the unfortunate events which befell the country imposing new circumstances on the Syrian arena. For all of us, these conditions represent a serious test of our national commitment, and we cannot pass this test except by our continuous work and honest intents based on our faith in God, the genuine character of our people, and its solid nature which has been polished over the ages and made brighter and more robust. Although those events have made us pay, until now, heavy prices which made my heart bleed, as it made the heart of every Syrian bleed, yet they require the sons of Syria, regardless of their beliefs and doctrines, to be wise and sensible, and to be guided by their deep national feelings. Only then our entire country can achieve victory with our unity, our fraternity, and our will to go beyond narrow horizons and momentary interests and reach where our noble national issues lie. For this is our destination and there lies the strength of our country and the glory of our history.

External conspiring is no longer a secret because what is being plotted in the pal talk rooms has started to be clearly revealed before the eyes of the people. It is not possible anymore to deceive others except for those who do not want to listen or see; as the tears shed by the dealers of freedom and democracy for our own victims can no longer conceal the role they played in the bloodshed which they tried to use for their own purposes. At the beginning of the crisis, it was not easy to explain what happened. Emotional reactions and the absence of rationality were surpassing the facts. But now, the fog has lifted, and it is no longer possible for the regional and international parties which wanted to destabilize Syria to forge the facts and the events. Now the masks have fallen off the faces of those parties, and we have become more capable of deconstructing the virtual environment which they have created to push Syrians towards illusion and then make them fall. That virtual environment was created to lead to a psychological and moral defeat which would eventually lead to the actual defeat. That unprecedented media attack was meant to lead us to a state of fear, and this fear, which could paralyze the will, would lead to defeat.

Over sixty T.V. channels in the world are devoted to work against Syria. Some of them are devoted to working against the Syrian domestic situation, and some others are working to distort the image of Syria abroad. There are tens of internet websites, and tens of newspapers and different media channels, which means that we are talking about hundreds of media networks.

Their aim was to push us to a state of self-collapse in order to save their efforts in waging many battles; and they failed in doing so, yet they did not give in.

One of their attempts which you are aware of is what they did with me personally in my

interview with the American news channel. Usually I do not watch myself on T.V whether in an interview or a speech. That time I watched the interview and I was about to believe what I myself was presented to have said. If they were capable of convincing me of the lie, how can they not convince others! Fortunately, we had an original version of the interview, and they did what they did because they thought that we did not have an original version which we can present to the citizens to compare with their version. Had that not been the case, no one would have ever believed the professional fabrication which they did even if I talk now for hours and try to tell you I did not say what was misrepresented on that news channel.

Of course, they had one aim in mind. When they failed in causing a state of collapse on the popular and institutional levels in Syria, they wanted to target the top of the pyramid of the state in order to say to the citizens, on the one hand, and, of course, to the West, on the other hand, that this person lives in a cocoon and does not know what has been going on. They also wanted to say to the citizens, especially those in the state, that if the top figure in the pyramid is evading responsibility and feeling that things are falling apart, then it is normal for things to go out of control.

There were continuous rumors like saying that the president has left the country, as to say that the president has given up on his responsibilities. They did their best to circulate those rumors but we say to them, 'in your dreams, for I am not a person who surrenders his responsibilities.'

When I sipped some water in my previous speech, they said the president is nervous, but we never fish in troubled waters, neither in crises nor in normal situations. Now they will use the previous statement to say that the Syrian president is announcing that he will not relinquish his post. In fact, they do not distinguish between the two notions of 'office' and 'responsibility', and I did say in the year 2000 that I am not after office and I do not run away from responsibility. An office does not have any value. It is a sheer device and whoever seeks to office does not get respect.

We are talking now about responsibility, and this responsibility derives its importance from public support. This means that I acquire a position with the support of the people; and when I leave it, it will be with the will of this people. This is final, and regardless of what you heard, I always based my external policy in all our positions on public support and public will. What do we make of the interview with the American channel in the media framework? There was repeated talk about the good intention of many from within Syria and the outside world. Why did we not allow the media to enter Syria? In fact, during the first month or month and a half of the crisis, Arab and foreign media networks were completely free to move inside Syria. However, all the media fabrications, and the whole political and media campaign against Syria, were built on that phase of forging and distortion; and there is a difference between distorting the truth then giving it credibility as being presented from the inside of Syria, on the one hand, and distorting the truth from the outside of Syria where less credibility tends to be given to such misrepresentation. That is why we took a decision not to close the door to all media networks, but to be selective in the access given to them in order to control the quality of the information or the falsification which goes beyond the borders.

We were patient in an unprecedented battle in Syria's modern history; a battle that made us stronger. If this battle carries significant risks and decisive challenges, the victory is very close as long as we are able to survive and invest in our points of strength which are many, and to know weaknesses of opponents which are even more. Your public awareness which is

based on facts, not on hype, underestimation, exaggerations or simplifications, had the most important role in uncovering the scheme and restricting it in preparation for thwarting it entirely. In our quest to dismantle that virtual environment and to ensure the importance of the internal situation in confronting any external interference, we took the initiative to talk transparently on having a default here and a defect or delay there in some areas. I mean in previous speeches when I was talking about mistakes, but we did not mean at all to underestimate the importance of such external schemes. I do not think that a reasonable person can deny today those schemes that shifted acts of sabotage and terrorism to another level of crime which targeted minds, highly qualified people and institutions. The aim of which is to generalize the state of panic, to destroy morale and to make you reach the state of despair which would open the way for what was planned in the outside to become a reality, but this time with local hands.

At the beginning, they searched for their desired revolution, but their revolution was against them and against their vandals and their tools. Since the early days, however, the people revolted against them, thus precluding them and their henchmen. When they were shocked by your unity, they tried to dismantle and fragment this unity through using the hideous sectarian weapon after masking it with the cover of holy religion. When they lost hope to achieve their goals, they shifted into acts of sabotage and murder under different headings and covers such as the utilization of some peaceful demonstrations and the exploitation of wrong practices done by persons in the state. Thus, they started the process of assassinations and attempted to isolate cities and dividing the various parts of the country. They stole, looted and destroyed public and private facilities and after experimenting with all possible ways and means in today's world with all the regional and international media and political support, they did not find a foothold for their hoped-for revolution.

Here comes the foreign role after they failed in all attempts; there was no choice but the foreign intervention. When we say foreign, it usually comes to our minds that it is the foreign outside. Unfortunately, this foreign outside has become a mix of Arab and foreign, and sometimes, in many cases, this Arab part is more hostile and worse than the foreign one. I do not want to generalize; the image is not that bleak because Arab countries are not the same in their policies. There are countries which tried during this stage to play a morally objective role towards what is happening in Syria. In contrast, there are countries that basically do not care about what is happening in general. I mean they stand on the fence in most cases, and there are countries that carry out what they are asked to do. What is strange is that some Arab officials are with us in heart and against us in politics. When we ask for clarifications, it is said or the official says I am with you, but there are external pressures. I mean this is a semi-official declaration of losing sovereignty. It is not a surprise that the countries will one day link their policies to the policies of foreign countries just like linking local currency to foreign currencies, and thus giving away sovereignty becomes a sovereign matter.

The truth is that this is the peak of deterioration for the Arab situation, but any deterioration always precedes a renaissance; when we move from the first independence which is the first liberation of land from occupation to the second independence which is the independence of the will. We will reach this independence when Arab peoples take the lead in the Arab world in general. This is because the official policies we see do not utterly reflect what we see on the public arenas in the Arab world.

We do not see this Arab role, which we have suddenly seen now, when there is a crisis or a dilemma in an Arab country. In contrast, we see it in its best forms when there is trouble in a

foreign country or a superpower. Saving that state from its crisis is often at the expense of another state or at the expense of Arab states, and often through the destruction of an Arab country. This is what happened in Iraq and this is what happened in Libya, and this is what we see now in the Arab role towards Syria. After they failed in the Security Council when they could not convince the world of their lies, there was a need for an Arab cover and a need for having an Arab platform. Here comes this initiative. The truth of this initiative and the monitors' issue is that I am the one who proposed this issue in my meeting with the Arab League delegation a few months ago. We said since the international organizations came to Syria, reviewed the facts and they got a positive reaction at least through reviewing things – we do not say things are all positive; they see positive and negative things and we do not want more than knowing the truth as it is – it is more worthy of the Arabs to send a delegation to see what is happening in Syria. Of course, there was not any interest in this proposal put forward by Syria, but suddenly after several months, we see that this topic became the focus of global attention. It was not sudden attention towards what we put forward at all, but because the scheme has started from the outside under this title.

In all cases we continued dialogue with various parties and the Foreign Minister spoke in his press conferences on details I will not repeat here. We were focusing on one thing only which is the sovereignty of Syria. We were considering that the Arab citizen, the Arab official or the Arab observer has feelings towards us; I mean we remain Arabs who sympathize with each other no matter how bad the Arab situation is. Why they started the Arab initiative? The same countries that claim concern for the Syrian people were initially advising us to reform. Of course, these countries do not have the least knowledge of democracy and have no heritage in this area, but they were thinking that we will not be moving towards reform and there will be a title for these countries to use internationally that there is a conflict inside Syria between a state that does not want reform and the people who want reform, freedom or the like.

When we started reform, this thing was confusing for them, thus they shifted to the issue of the Arab League or the Arab initiative. The truth is that if we are to follow these countries, which give us advice, we have to go backward at least a century and a half. What happened a century and a half ago? We were part of the Ottoman Empire and we had the first parliament which we are concerned with in one way or another. The first parliament was opened in the year / 1877 / and if we put this aside, the first parliament in Syria was in 1919; this means less than a century ago. Therefore, imagine these countries that want to advise us about democracy! Where were these countries at that time? Their status is like the status of a smoking doctor who advises the patient to quit smoking while putting a cigarette in his mouth.

Eventually, outrage of the Arab or public reaction in Syria towards the issue of the Arab League was the result. In fact, I was not angry; why to get angry with someone who does not know his decision. If someone attacks us with a knife, we defend ourselves not by struggling with the knife but with the person. The knife is just a tool. Our struggle is not with these people but against those who stand behind them. The public reaction was outrage, indignation and surprise; why did not the Arabs stand with Syria rather than standing against Syria? I ask a question: when did they stand with Syria?! I will not go back far in the past, but let us just talk about the past few years. Let us start by the war on Iraq, after the invasion, when Syria was threatened with bombing and invasion. Who stood with Syria in 2005 when they exploited the assassination of Hariri? Who stood alongside Syria in 2006? Who supported our positions against the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in 2008? Who

supported us in the IAEA in relation to the alleged nuclear file? Arab states vote against us. These facts may be unknown to many citizens. That is why we need to explain everything in these junctures and situations.

Recently, Arab states voted against Syria with regard to the Human Rights issue. In contrast, some non-Arab countries stand with Syria. That is why we should not be surprised. I mean we should not be surprised with the Arab League status because it is just a reflection of the Arab situation. The Arab League is a mirror of our situation.

The Arab League mirrors our current miserable situation. If it has failed in over six decades in taking a position in the Arab interest, why are we surprised today if the general context is the same and hasn't changed except in the sense that it is pushing the Arab condition from bad to worse and in that what was happening in secret is now happening in public under the slogan of the nation's interest.

Has the Arab league actually gained independence for its states, and consequently for itself? Has it ever implemented its decisions and removed the dust off its files and achieved only a fragment of the aspirations of the Arab peoples? Or has it contributed directly to sowing the seeds of sedition and disunity? Has it respected its charter and defended its member states whose land, or the rights of whose peoples, have been violated? Has it returned one olive tree uprooted by Israel or prevented the demolition of one Palestinian house in occupied Arab Palestine? Has it been able to prevent the partition of Sudan or prevent the killing of over a million Iraqis or feed a single starved Somali?

Today, we are not in the process of attacking the Arab League because we are part of it, although we are in the age of decadence. Nor am I talking about the Arab league because it or the Arab states have taken a decision to suspend Syria's membership in it. This does not concern us in the least. I am talking about it because I have noticed the extent of popular frustration which we need to put in its natural context. The Arab League has been doomed for a long time. When we used to sit in Arab summits listening to criticism and denunciation whose echo reverberated in conference halls, we used to talk about this candidly, as Arab officials; some felt ashamed and some behaved as if it was no concern of theirs. So, being out of the Arab League, or suspending Syria's membership, and all this talk is not the issue. The issue is who wins and who loses. Does Syria or the Arab League lose? For us, we and the Arab states are losing as long as the Arab condition is bad. This is a chronic situation, nothing new in it, and there are no winners. We have been working for years to minimize the losses because it is not possible to win. But suspending Syria's membership raises a question: can the body live without a heart? Who said that Syria is the throbbing heart of Arabism? It wasn't a Syrian, it was President Abdul Naser, and this is still true.

Many Arabs have the same conviction. For Syria Arabism is not a slogan, it is a practice. Who offered, more than Syria, and is still offering and paying the price? Who, more than Syria, has offered to the Palestinian cause in particular? Who, more than Syria, has given to the process of Arabizing culture and education everywhere, in the mass media? Syria is quite strict about Arabization, particularly in school curricula. Who has offered more to Arabism and to Arabization and insisted on Arab culture in their school curricula more than Syria does in its schools and universities. The issue for us is not a slogan. If some countries seek to suspend our Arabism in the League, we say to them that they are suspending the Arab identity of the League itself. They cannot suspend Syria's Arab identity. On the contrary, the League without Syria suspends its own Arab identity.

If some believe they can get us out of the League, they cannot get us out of our Arab identity, because the Arab identity is not a political decision. It is heritage and history. Those countries, which you know, have not acquired, and will not acquire, the Arab identity. If they believe that with money they can buy some geography and rent and import some history, we tell them that money does not make nations or create civilizations. Consequently, and as I heard from many Syrians, and I agree with them on this point, maybe in our present condition we are freer in exercising our real and pure Arabism which Syrians have been the best to express throughout history. That is why we say that with this attempt they don't focus on getting Syria out of the League, but rather on suspending Arabism itself so that it becomes an Arab League only in name. It will no longer be a league – bringing people together – or Arab. It will be a mock-Arab body in order to be in line with their policies and the role they are playing on the Arab arena. Otherwise, how can we explain this unprecedented and unreasonable tact with the Zionist enemy in everything it does and this decisiveness and toughness with Syria?

We have been trying for years to activate the Israel-boycott office; and we have been receiving excuses of the type that this is no longer acceptable; but, within a few weeks, they activate a boycott against Syria. This means that their objective is replacing Syria with Israel. This is only a pattern; and we are not naïve. We have known this Arab condition for a very long time. We have not clung to illusions. By showing our patience regarding these practices, before and during this crisis, we wanted to prove to all those who have their doubts about the bad intentions, wrapped in beautiful and ornamented language, that their intentions are bad and their objectives are vile. I think now this has become abundantly clear to most people.

We realize all that. But based on our genuine Arab character, and our desire to restore the original idea of the Arab League, in which we are supported by some sisterly countries keen on making the Arab League a truly collective and Arab body, we haven't closed the doors to any solution or proposal; and we shall never close the door to any Arab endeavor as long as it respects our sovereignty, the independence of our decision and the unity of our people.

All these negative accumulations on the Arab arena, throughout decades, in addition to the current situation, led some of our citizens to take their anger out on Arabism which has been wrongly confused with the Arab League or the performance of some pseudo-Arabs to the extent that they denounced it.

Brothers and sisters,

The social structure of the Arab world, with its large diversity, is based on two strong and integrated pillars: Arabism and Islam. Both of them are great, rich and vital. Consequently, we cannot blame them for the wrong human practices. Furthermore, the Muslim and Christian diversity in our country is a major pillar of our Arabism and a foundation of our strength. When we get angry with Arabism or abandon it because of what some have done on this wide Arab arena we commit a gross injustice. As we have refused to generalize the mistakes done by some officials to the whole country, we shouldn't generalize the mistakes of some pseudo-Arabs to Arabism. What we are doing now is similar to what the west did against Islam in the wake of 9/11.

We say that there is a great religion – Islam, and there are terrorists taking cover under Islam. Who should we banish: religion or terrorism? Do we denounce religion or terrorists? Do we fight those who trade in Islam or fight terrorism? The answer is clear: It is not the

fault of Islam when there are terrorists who take cover under the mantle of Islam.

Christianity is a religion of love and peace. What is the fault of Christianity in the wars waged under its name and in the crimes committed in the heart of America or in European countries by people who claim to be committed to Christian values? The same applies to Arabism. We should not link it to what some pseudo-Arabs are doing; otherwise we head towards the greatest sin. There are things which have existed through a historical process and we cannot respond to them by an act or a decision. These things didn't take place through a decision. There is a historical context and there is a divine will behind religions and nationality which we cannot face through reaction.

The first reaction was proposing the "Syria first" concept. It is natural to put Syria first. Every person belongs to his country first and foremost. One's homeland cannot be in the second, third or fourth place; but the context in which this concept was made was isolationist – only Syria.

Every person belongs first to his city more than to other cities. He is naturally connected to it. Everyone likes the village he grew up in more than other villages, but this doesn't prevent one from being patriotic and like the whole of the homeland. Being Syrian doesn't prevent us from being Arabs; and being Arab doesn't create any contradiction between our Arab and Syrian identities.

That is why we should stress that point, that the relationship between Arabism and patriotism is a close and vital one for the future, for our interests and for everything. It is not about romanticism or principles. It is about interests too. If we separate this fact from reaction, we should always know that Arabism is an identity not a membership. Arabism is an identity given by history not a certificate given by an organization. Arabism is an honor that characterizes Arab peoples not a stigma carried by some pseudo-Arabs on the Arab or world political stage.

Some might wonder about all this talk about Arabism and Arabs while in Syria there are only Arabs. My response is: who said that we are talking about an Arab race? Had Arabism been only the Arab race, we wouldn't have had much to be proud of. The last thing in Arabism is race. Arabism is a question of civilization, a question of common interests, common will and common religions. It is about the things which bring about all the different nationalities which live in this place. The strength of this Arabism lies in its diversity not in its isolation and not in its oneness. Arabism hasn't been built by the Arabs. Arabism has been built by all those non-Arabs who contributed to building it and those who belong to this rich society in which we live. Its strength lies in its diversity. Had there been a group of non-Arabs who wanted to change their traditions and customs and abandon them, we would oppose them on the grounds that they weaken Arabism. The strength of our Arabism lies in openness, diversity and in showing this diversity not integrating it to look like one component. Arabism has been accused for decades of chauvinism. This is not true. If there are chauvinistic individuals, this doesn't mean that Arabism is chauvinistic. It is a condition of civilization.

All the above will not affect our vision of the internal situation in Syria and how we deal with it. There is no doubt that the current events and their repercussions have posed a huge number of questions and ideas which aim at finding different solutions for the current situation Syria is going through. If it is natural and self evident, but it cannot be positive and effective except when it is based on the importance of facing the problem not running away

from it, or when it is based on courage not panic and escaping forward.

If we want to talk about the internal situation – and I think it is the issue over which all Syrians' concerns are focused – we should identify issues clearly. There are numerous ideas, which might be good. But unless they are put in the appropriate framework they remain useless and sometimes harmful. Instead of having ideas moving in one strain contradicting and fighting with each other, let's draw some definitions before we get into the details.

First, we cannot carry out internal reform without dealing with facts as they are on the ground, whether we like them or not. We cannot just hang on to a straw in the air. Neither the straw nor the air will carry us. This means falling. Under the pressure of the crisis, some talk about any solution and call for any solution. We shall not give 'any' solution. We shall only give 'solutions'. Solutions mean that the results are known beforehand. 'Any solution' will lead to the abyss. It might lead to deepening the crisis. It might get us into an impasse. The pressure of the crisis will not push us to adopt just 'any' plan. Even though time is very important, but it is not more important than the quality of the solution which we shall provide.

Today, we are dealing with two aspects of internal reform: the first is political reform and the second is fighting terrorism which has spread recently to different parts of Syria. In the reform process, there are those who believe that what we are doing now is the way to get out of the crisis or is the whole solution to the crisis. This is not true. We are not doing it for this reason. The relationship between reform and the crisis is limited. In the beginning, it had a larger role, when we decided to separate those who claim reform for terrorist objectives and those who genuinely want reform. This has happened. My vision from the very beginning was that there is no relation between the two, but it wasn't easy to talk about it then because, as I said, things were not clear for many Syrians as they have become clear now.

What is the relationship between the reform process and the outside plot? Will the outside plots against Syria stop if we introduce the reforms today? I'll tell you something. We know a great deal about discussions taking place outside Syria, particularly in the West about the situation in Syria. None of those involved cares about neither the number of the victims nor about reforms, neither about what has been achieved nor what will be achieved. Everyone is talking about Syria's policies and whether Syria's behavior has changed from the beginning of the crisis till now.

On the other hand, there were those who came to bargain, saying if you do 1, 2, 3, 4, at least the outside part of the crisis and its internal tentacles will stop immediately. So, there is no relation between reform and the outside part of the crisis, because this part is against reform and because reform will make Syria stronger. If Syria is stronger, this means strengthening Syrian policies, and we all know that Syrian policies are not well liked in foreign circles. On the contrary, such policies are loathed by many countries which want us to be mere lackeys.

The second point: what is the relationship between reform and terrorism? If we carry out the reforms, will terrorists stop? Does this mean that the terrorists who are killing and destroying are keen on the political parties law, the local administration elections or things of that kind? They are not. Terrorists don't care. Reform will not prevent terrorists from being terrorists. So, what is the component which concerns us?

The greatest part of the Syrian people want reform, and they have not come out, haven't broken the law, haven't killed. This is the largest part of the Syrian people, it is the part which wants reform. For us, reform is the natural context. That is why we announced a phased reform in the year 2000. In my swear-in speech I talked about modernization and development. At that time, I was focused on state institutions. In 2005, we talked about political reform. Part of what we are doing now was proposed in 2005 in the Bath party conference. At that time there were no pressures in this regard. Pressure was different, in a different direction. No one was talking about internal reform. We proposed it because we thought of it as a natural context not a forced one. It cannot be forced. It is a natural requirement for development. We cannot develop without reform. Whether we were late or not is a different question. Why we were late is a different question. But it remained a natural need. Had reform been part of the crisis, it would fail; and if reform were forced, it would fail. That's why, in our discussion of reform, let's separate natural needs from the crisis.

If we start from the current crisis, reform will be abrupt and tied to its current circumstances which are temporary. What about future decades? Things will be different. We have to connect what is before the crisis with what is after it regardless of it and then base our work on the reform process. Of course this is not in the absolute. Sometimes, we take into account what we are going through now in our reform efforts. We don't separate it completely from the timetable. Sometimes we move quickly. Sometimes we assume that people's reaction needs a move in a certain direction. There are some impacts of the crisis; but we don't build our reforms on the crisis. If we do so, we justify foreign powers' intervention in our crisis under the title of reform. So, let's agree on separating the two and deal with the details on these grounds.

Now that we talked about the details, I proposed in my speech in this auditorium last June about an action plan; and I talked mainly about the legislative component in relation to laws and the constitution. At that time, I offered a timeframe for the laws which have all been passed within the timeframe identified at the time. Now, we hear many people saying "we haven't seen any tangible results". I always like to talk transparently, and I'll address every subject separately.

The first law we passed was lifting the state of emergency. In such circumstances that Syria is going through, can any state lift the state of emergency. On the contrary, any state would have imposed the state of emergency. Nevertheless, we didn't do that. We insisted on lifting the state of emergency. Some Syrians accused us of abandoning part of the security of Syria because we lifted the state of emergency. Of course this is inaccurate, because lifting the state of emergency or the state of emergency itself doesn't provide security. It is rather an organizational issue. When there is a state of emergency, there are certain measures and when it is lifted there is a different set of measures. We haven't abandoned security.

No state could accept to abandon security. The laws and the measures now in place give us full authority to control security regardless of the state of emergency law. But lifting the state of emergency needs training for the relevant services, including the security and police forces which deal with citizens. We all know that they are all over Syria now; and some of them haven't taken leave for months. So, it is logical, reasonable or practical to train them now? This is impossible. There will be no training in the current circumstances. Nevertheless, we insist that the services stress some basic regulations in relation to lifting the state of emergency. When there is an environment of terrorism, destruction and law breaking, if there are errors they will multiply tens of folds. That is why we are not dealing

only with the results but with the causes too. The results are the mistakes we see being committed by some, but the causes are related to the state of chaos in itself. We need to control the chaos in order to feel the results. In other words, we cannot feel the true effects of lifting the state of emergency while chaos prevails. And here I distinguish, of course, between different levels of mistakes, on the one hand, and killing, on the other.

There is no cover for anyone; but the issue of killing needs evidence. Some people believe that none of those who committed acts of killing have been arrested. That's not true in relation to those working for the state. A limited number of people have been arrested in relation to murder and other crimes. I say limited because the evidence was limited and connected with those people. The existence of evidence or searching for evidence needs institutions; and institutions need appropriate conditions; and the current conditions hamper the work of such institutions. But I would like to stress that there is no cover for anyone; and there is no order, I stress, no order at any level of the state to shoot at any citizen. Shooting, under the law, is allowed only in the case of self defence and in defence of citizens and in cases of engaging an armed person. So, there is a specific case in the law. In this regard, I stress the need to deal with causes and effects.

Concerning the political parties, the political parties law has been issued. Some parties have applied and have been given licenses. The first license was given to the first party a few weeks ago; and I believe that yesterday or today there is a second party on the way which met all the conditions. There are many other parties which are still trying to meet the conditions and submit the necessary documents to be licensed. Of course we didn't feel the existence of these parties, because political parties need time. But, in any case, after the political parties law has been passed, we haven't only given licenses, but encouraged many groups to form parties. I don't think that the state is responsible in this regard. We will not form any parties, will not appear in the media or conduct activities on behalf of anyone. So, there are no obstacles in this regard and it is only a question of time.

The local administration law has been passed and elections have been held. Of course they have been held in difficult circumstances; and it is natural that they will not give the desired results because participation, neither on the part of the candidates or the voters, was not as they were supposed to be with a new law because of the security conditions. There was a point of view saying that we should postpone local administration elections to a later stage. But there was a different opinion, which we adopted, saying that there should be change because every change is positive, particularly that most citizens' complaints were about the performance of local administration. We embarked on that effort. But in any case, anything related to elections will not give results if there is no broad participation on the part of candidates and also on the part of voters, so that there is competition. That is why you will not feel the results. In general, with anything related to elections, part of the responsibility lies on the citizens and not only on the state.

As for the media law, I think the government has completed last week the preparation of executive instructions and have become ready for implementation. There are requests ready for television, press and others. The election law was issued and the aim of which is to frame all these ideas that we hear on the political scene, and anyone who has an idea should go to the ballot box which is the voice of law for everything in this country; this is the core of the issue.

The important law is the law of fighting corruption. It is the only law which has been delayed for several months. The first reason is related to the fact that this law is very important and

has many aspects. Therefore, I asked the government to extensively consider it in collaboration with various bodies and parties. It was put on the internet and there were many posts and useful ideas. The government finished this and sent it to the Syrian Presidency which sent it back recently to the government. It is a good law which includes very important points and a point related to the inspecting authority.

In the current law, the anti-corruption law, the inspection commission was abolished, and the Anti-Corruption Commission replaced the inspection commission, but the anti-corruption law is specialized in corruption cases. This means that it deals only with small issue which does not often list all cases of corruption. This commission deals with corruption after its appearance, while the inspection commission was in charge of broader functions, including organization of management, raising proposals in the field of management and control of state action in terms of administration as well as combating corruption. Thus, the abolition of all these tasks and linking them only to one title which is corruption is not good, especially that fighting corruption cannot be done in isolation from the organization of the administration.

We cannot fight corruption alone because this is a great imbalance apart from other points that are present. There are proposals on the integration of the inspection commission with the Financial Control Commission, but this issue is not important. The most important thing is to know the relationship between inspection and Anti-Corruption Commissions. If there is a cancellation of the inspection commission, will the Anti-Corruption Commission include all the tasks of the two bodies or should we leave the two commissions and specify different tasks for each one of them, or should we coordinate between both of them in respect of the issue of corruption? That is why this law was resent to the government to resolve this point. After that, the law of fighting corruption will be issued.

Anyway, if the law was passed in the best of conditions, it will be easy for the state to fight corruption at the intermediate level and above, but it is difficult to fight it from the intermediate level and below without the contribution of the citizens and the media. This means that prosecution will not be done even by this commission because it will only receive information. Thus, we need to look for the information and report them to this commission. This means that the success of this law needs significant popular awareness.

Within the framework of the corruption topic, many people whom I meet say we want the President to hold corrupt people accountable. Here, I want to clarify that the President does not replace institutions; I handle one or two issues when I see an error, but the institution holds thousands of people accountable or address thousands of cases. When the President replaces the institutions, this will not be reassuring even if he is doing the right thing. Therefore, we have to work in order to activate institutions.

I told them that I will take care of this law and the activation of these institutions, and I want to see fighting corruption through normal legal channels. At that time, we solved the problems of thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands and millions of Syrians. I always focus on institutional work. If I solved a problem, it is an individual problem; I solve the problem of someone but not the problem of thousands of people.

The other pillar in reform is the Constitution. The decree that provides for establishing a committee to draft the constitution was issued. This committee was given a deadline of four months and I think that it has become in its final stages. This constitution will focus on a fundamental and essential point which is the multi-party system and political pluralism.

They were talking only about article eight, but we said that the entire Constitution should be amended because there is a correlation among articles. The Constitution will focus on the fact that the people is the source of authority, especially during elections, the dedication of the institutions' role, the freedoms of the citizens and other things and basic principles.

There was a question: why we had legal reform before changing the Constitution? Logically, we must begin with the Constitution and then laws come after that. This is true in terms of logic, but people's pressure and questioning the credibility of the state that it wishes to carry out real reform, have led us to work in parallel. Moreover, issuing laws is faster in terms of time; it takes a few months and this is less than needed by the Constitution. If logic contradicts reality, we go with reality and in any case this is not an important issue. What is really important is that when laws are passed and the Constitution is drafted, we will be in a new phase which is not a transition. This is related to the legislation aspect.

As for things that we can do as initiative, we heard a lot about a national unity government. I always like to check terminology because we should not take the term without knowing its content. We hear about the national unity government in the states that have complete division on the national level between parties, a civil war, war-lords communities or princes of nationalities who are directly gathered at the table or through representatives to form a government of national unity. We do not have a national division. We have problems, we have a split in certain cases, but we do not have a national division in the sense that could be asked. I know they do not mean this, but I do not use such an expression as 'national unity government'. For this reason we do not have a government of national division. At any rate, governments in Syria are always diversified governments which include independents and various parties.

But now we have a new political map for the crisis and the new Constitution. With the new parties' law, new political forces have emerged and must be taken into consideration. Some may propose the participation of all these political forces in the government. Some others focus on the opposition. I say all political parties from the center to the opposition to the pro-government forces and everyone should contribute because the government is the homeland's government not a government of a party or a state. The more we extend participation, the more benefits we achieve in all aspects and generally for the sake of the national feeling. Thus, expanding the government is a good idea. I do not know what label we may use here because some call it a national consensus and some others call it expansion participation; this does not matter. What is important is that we welcome the participation of all political forces. In fact, we started dialogue recently even in general headlines with some political forces to take their views in this participation and the answer was positive.

I want to go back to a point in the Constitution which is related to the dates. When the Committee finishes the draft constitution within the time limit, there will be several propositions either to be issued by the President as a decree, or to be referred to parliament in order to be issued by a law. I refused the first and the second and I stressed the fact that there should be a referendum because the Constitution is not the state's Constitution; it is an issue related to every Syrian citizen. Therefore, we will resort to a referendum after the committee finishes its work and presents the Constitution which will be put through constitutional channels to reach a referendum. The referendum on the Constitution could be done at the beginning of March.

Parliamentary elections are linked to the constitution, especially as most of the political

forces want to have these elections after having the constitution. I was thinking as I said in my last speech that it would be at the end of last year or the beginning of this year, but as a response to their will, I say that elections are linked to the new constitution because this would give much time for these powers to establish and prepare themselves and their grassroots for the elections. We said that we do not have any objection to this.

The timeframe is connected with the new constitution. What is the constitutional grace period: two or three months? If it was two months, and the referendum is held in March, the elections can be held in early May. If the grace period is three months, the elections can be held in early June. This depends on the new constitution.

Back to the subject of the national unity government, if we talk about the participation of the opposition and say that all the parties will take part in the government including the opposition, who do we mean by 'opposition'? Any person can now call himself/herself 'opposition', and I have met some of such people and used to ask them, 'who do you represent?' The opposition stands for a public body, not for a person as an opponent. Now we have opposition figures and currents, but the opposition is usually an institutional body which is established by elections. For the time being, we do not have elections; so how do we define the opposition? Who takes part in that opposition, and what is the volume of their participation? We still do not have the criteria for all this. Before the next elections, we could still say that the government will take a certain form after the elections. But we want to accelerate the process and launch the contribution in the opposition before the elections. In other words, we will adopt special, rather than institutional, criteria.

We haven't accused people of being traitors. The criteria are clear stating the establishment of a national opposition. What do we mean by 'national government?' We do not want an opposition that sits in embassies and receives gestures from the outside where they will be told not to have dialogue with the state or to delay the dialogue now because things are over and it is a matter of weeks before the total collapse! We do not want an opposition that sits with us and blackmails us under the title of the crisis in order to achieve personal gains. We do not want an opposition that wants to have a secret dialogue to avoid the anger of others. If we take the existing national criteria and figures, we can start to work on this government immediately now that we have understood the subject, whether they call it a 'national unity government' or 'separation government'. What they choose to name it is not important at all.

This means that we will start to work on this within a very short period of time, but there is an important question: will the government be political or technical? Some talked about having a micro political government, but this does not work for several reasons. First, we are a country with a big public sector which is not independent and where each institution still depends on the ministry, the minister, the deputy minister, the directors, and others.

Can a political figure lead a technical sector? This is not possible in addition to the fact that the problems of the people are not limited to the security issue. There are issues to do with the services which everyone is complaining about at the time. Will a political government be able to provide the people with diesel, gas, or medicine? This is unrealistic in our current conditions. Let there be an inclusive government which has a mixture of politicians and technocrats and which represents the political forces, if they want to be represented, and comprises the technical aspect where we do not lose this or that. I believe that this is the best framework, but of course I always like to have dialogue and discuss things with others in order to see the negatives of every proposal. At the moment, I am raising titles which

were not agreed upon completely. I am only presenting the framework and introducing preferences which we could change throughout the discussions.

There was a question about dialogue. We launched the dialogue in July, and we were supposed to start with the extensive dialogue and then move to the central dialogue. However, different forces exerted pressure to reverse the process and we agreed and finished the first phase of the dialogue without the contribution of all the opposition forces. Only part of them participated in the dialogue which was a very fruitful dialogue with a wide participation from the different institutions in the governorates.

Two months ago it was suggested to start the third phase of the dialogue on the central level, and I can say that we, as a state, political party, or authority, are ready to start tomorrow and have no problem in that. However, some of the opposition forces are not ready. Part of them wants to conduct a secret dialogue for certain personal gains, as I mentioned earlier, and another part wants to wait and see how things go so that they determine where to go. But we will not wait for those forces to come and join in a celebratory dialogue which is conducted just to show off. We are now having dialogue with other forces which are ready to have a public dialogue and we are discussing the ideas which were raised earlier. What I wanted to clarify is that the delay in the dialogue is not caused by Syria.

We have even accepted to have dialogue under the Arab initiative which was built on the idea of conducting dialogue with all the forces including hostile forces which committed crimes of terrorism in the seventies and the eighties of the last century. We said that we did not have a problem in conducting dialogue with these forces if they wanted to come to Syria, and we gave all the guarantees. In other words, we do not have any restrictions to dialogue and we will show full openness when we see that everybody is ready for the dialogue and has a perspective on that dialogue. We are ready to start dialogue right away.

There will always be a question as to whether we will witness changes and transformation. Usually I do not talk about this as we tend to change things whenever there is need for transformation. But it is clear from my earlier speech that we will be witnessing changes. When we talk about a new government and a new structure of the government, and when the Country Command has been announcing for a week now that there will be a national conference very soon, this means that we will be witnessing changes, part of which already started few days ago. The most important thing is for these changes to focus in the future on the young generation which considers itself marginalized to a large extent, although it is the generation which faced the crisis boldly; and we saw how young people have been active in defending their country with all the meaning of the word.

At any rate, Syria now needs all its honest sons, regardless of their political attitudes. And when we talk about the coming phase, while we are still at the beginning of the New Year, some talk about the new Syria. But I say we do not have a 'new Syria' but a 'renewed Syria' because renewal is a continuous process and we are talking here about a new phase, rather than a new Syria. We have to understand the requirements of every phase; otherwise, all that we have said will be futile. What we have dealt with comprises procedures and regulations whose implementation does not succeed without the awareness needed for any process of development and transition. I can give an answer to this by saying that the previous ten months, with all their miseries, were very helpful in this regard as they proved to the Syrian people that they are capable with their awareness to present a model of a modern country which is stages and centuries ahead of other countries. I was talking about

a hundred and fifty years, but actually we are capable of becoming one thousand years ahead of those countries which try to give us lessons about democracy, and I am confident that this future will come. Even so, the more we are capable of spreading the state awareness which we have witnessed, the better the situation. There is no doubt that despite the presence of an overall awareness in Syria, there are small holes of ignorance which might influence the general situation, and we do not want such holes and certain cases of ignorance to influence the process of development. We rather want to have a maximum level of positives and a minimum level of negatives.

In summary, the points which are related to the issue of domestic reform have become clear. After the Constitution is issued, we do not have additional steps to make except for the procedures; and if there is a shortcoming in the laws, we can, after the Constitution is issued, re-study these laws as we will not stop at this stage of development. Notes are also to be taken about the laws and the practices as mistakes might happen throughout the implementation, and the process of renewal is a continuous process on the anatomical level.

Sisters and brothers,

What is taking place in Syria is part of what has been planned for the region for tens of years, as the dream of partition is still haunting the grandchildren of Sykes-Picot. But today their dream turns into a nightmare, and if some believe that the time of conflict over Syria is back, then they are mistaken because the conflict today is 'against Syria' and not 'over Syria' or 'on Syria'. And one thing we will never allow them to achieve is defeating Syria as it means defeating steadfastness and resistance and it also means the fall of the whole region to the hands of great powers. Defeat is not necessarily military and it might come true if they succeed in making us withdraw to internal conflicts and forget about our bigger issues on top of which the Palestinian Issue. Their ultimate goal which they aspire to achieve eventually is a Syria which is busy with internal marginal conflicts and withdrawn to its false borders, rather than its natural, historical, nationwide borders. They want to see a shrunk Syria which is prone to demise and deterioration as a result of division and partition, and their aim is to dismantle the cultural identity and character of our people which has always protected us against defeats of all kinds. Dismantling this identity leads to an actual defeat which was not caused by repeated wars, but which could be caused by the destroying the structure of a society that produced the systems of social and cultural resistance. This was the system which raised their concern more than any other system because it is the foundation and incubator of any form of resistance. But they did not succeed in destroying our identity or in shaking our belief that the resistance is at the core of this identity which shall remain firm as it has always been over history.

In cases of war or confrontation, states rearrange their priorities. Our utmost priority now, which is unparalleled by any other priority, is the restoration of the security we have enjoyed for decades, and which has characterized our country, not only in the region but throughout the world. This will only happen by striking these murderous terrorists hard. There is no compromise with terrorism, no compromise with those who use arms to cause chaos and division, no compromise with those who terrorize civilians, no compromise with those who conspire with foreigners against their country and against their people.

The battle against terrorism will not be the battle of the state or state institutions alone. It is the battle of all of us. It is a national battle; and it is everyone's duty to take part in it. "Internal sedition is more grievous than murder", because it involves dismantling and fragmenting society and ultimately destroying it. This is what we shall not allow in order to

keep Syria immune and impregnable.

Yet, the immune and impregnable state knows when and how to forgive, and knows how to bring its children back to right path. It knows how to take the hired guns out of the hands of those who have been misguided and delusioned and return them to the process of building a modern state while maintaining its authenticity and originality and the spring wells of its Arab and identity. In as much as we need to strike the terrorists in as much as we need to bring those who have gone astray back to the right path. There are those who made mistakes and those who have been misguided. After they started on their mistaken course, they have been told that the state will take revenge against you, so you cannot go back. The objective is to push them on the course of crime and to the point of no return.

The state is like the mother who opens the way for her children to be the best every day in order to maintain security and avoid bloodshed. That is why, in this regard, we have passed one amnesty after another. Some people believed that these amnesties led to more security failures. But the fact is that in most cases the results were positive, particularly when the amnesty was coordinated with local actors in every city, village and governorate and in coordination with the parents whom we met and talked to. They had enough wisdom to bring their children back to the right path.

Of course there are cases which don't succeed, but this is not the general trend. That is why I believe that decisiveness is necessary but continuing to show tolerance and forgiveness from time to time within the framework of clear criteria and sound mechanisms is equally important. I'll explain this point because many people didn't quite understand what we think of when we issue an amnesty in such security conditions. We conducted dialogue with everyone, except the criminals. I met a number of these people, even in the last few days. When they saw things moving in the direction of weapons and killing, a large number of them changed completely and started to cooperate with the state which he had opposed for objective or non-objective reasons. Some, however, persisted on their wrong course and the Quarnic verse "they stumble in their grave error" applies to them. There are those who lose their physical eyesight but compensate and excel in the arts, literature, science or other professions, but those who lose the 'mind's eye' are hopeless, for the real blindness is that of the mind not o the eyes.

Some of those really believe that they are revolutionaries. All right, let's see what they have done and what are their attributes. Would a real revolutionary steal a car or rob a house or a facility? Can the revolutionary be a thief? For us, the image of the revolutionary is a bright, idealistic untainted one with something very special about it. Those people have assassinated innocent people in and out of the state system. Can a revolutionary be characterized by cowardice and treachery? The prevented the schools from carrying out their tasks and functions in society. They did the same in universities. Can a revolutionary be against education? In some areas, teaching dropped to half, which means our schools would send to society people who are half educated half ignorant. Yet, we have another army fighting together with the armed forces, security services and the police. They are those in the education sector, particularly in schools in some areas where teaching dropped by 50% and they are risking their lives in order to continue the educational processes.

Until the end of 2011, the number of martyrs among teachers and university professors was about 30 and over a thousand schools have been vandalized, burned or destroyed.

On your behalf, I salute all the teachers, councilors, administrators and caretakers in

schools. Can a revolution be against education, against national unity? Can revolutionaries use language which calls for the disintegration of society? Can a revolutionary rise against citizens depriving them of cooking gas which they need on a daily basis in order to push them to hunger, or of heating fuel to make them catch their death because of the cold, or medicine to push them to death because of diseases or deprive them of their livelihood by burning government and private factories and facilities to make the poor poorer still?

This is not a revolution. Can a revolutionary work for the enemy – a revolutionary and a traitor at the same time? This is impossible. Can revolutionaries be without honor, moral values or religious principles? Have we had real revolutionaries, in the sense we know, you and I and the whole people would have moved with them. This is a fact.

The basic question which has been put to me with a great deal of intensity is: when and how will it end? This is, of course, a difficult question and we cannot give an answer without having all the facts. There are things which we know and things we don't. The first thing which we don't have full information about but we can draw deductions about is the conspiracy. It will end when the Syrian people decide to turn into a submissive people, when we submit and abandon all our heritage: the heritage of the October war of liberation in 1973, when we abandon our pan-Arab positions. We defended Lebanon in 1982, when it was the springboard of resistance which led to the liberation of Lebanon in 2000, when we stop supporting the resistance which we supported in 2006 and 2008 in Lebanon and Gaza, when we give free concessions partially or fully in the peace process, particularly in our occupied land in the Golan, when we abandon our pan-Arab positions towards the Palestinian cause which we have adopted since 1948, when we accept to be false witnesses to the systematic and unprecedented destruction of al-Aqsa mosque.

I don't know whether the Arab League would set up a committee to address this issue. I don't think they will, because it is an issue of concern only to 1.3 billion people; so it is not worthy of their concern and that is why they won't do it – just for the sake of comparison.

The Syrian people will never be submissive for many reasons. First, the principles to which he has been brought up; second, the models presented to us of submissive leaders, submissive policies or submissive states are not encouraging. In all circumstances and in the worst conditions, Syria's condition was better than the conditions of all those countries, even those who appear to be in good shape now. The symptoms haven't appeared so far, but one day they will.

All these things can be summed up in one word: Syrian dignity. We cannot abandon our dignity because it is the most precious thing the Syrian people possess. Our dignity is stronger than their armies and more precious than their wealth.

The second point is related to the first: when will it stop? When the smuggling of arms and money from outside stops. This related to the first point. When we submit and give in we reach the second point. But what I know fully is that the conspiracy will stop when we beat it. We shouldn't be reactive. It stops when we stop it. We can defeat it when we do so politically on the outside; and inside the country, we beat it when we beat this dangerous arm of the conspiracy which is terrorism. The second point is related to our wisdom and awareness. We beat the conspiracy when we beat our own whims and passivity and return to reason and go back to the state of pure love which we had in Syria. Thank God, this is still the general state in the country, but I am talking about a few areas.

There is no doubt that Syria is strong, but strength is not an absolute. The immunity of the strong and healthy person might drop, and when that happens he might get ill, but death and collapse are not inevitable. Immunity gets weaker when there is chaos. The events and the chaos which happened in Syria weakened this immunity. When that happened, terrorism struck. Consequently, whoever contributes to chaos now is a partner in terrorism and in shedding Syrian blood. We cannot separate the first from the second. We cannot fight terrorism without fighting chaos, for both of them are linked. This should be clear. Immunity drops when national awareness gets weaker.

Here, I am talking about those with god will and good intentions. Those with bad intentions do not concern us. In the beginning, we used to tell those with good intentions that there is a foreign conspiracy. They would respond by saying this is just shifting responsibility to others. We used to tell them there are weapons, and they would respond by saying, these are all fabrications of state media. Now things have become clear, albeit belatedly. This terrorism cannot appear like that suddenly. There are stages which started from the beginning. There was small-size terrorism using small arms and in small areas. Then it grew to reach this stage and this level.

We were late, and they were late in understanding this. This was a major obstacle, but our being late doesn't mean that we reached the point of no return. The important thing now is to stand united. When we have national causes, there should be no differences. When we differ, we go to the ballot box. We chose our government, our parliament. This is a different issue. But when there are foreign threats, the states which respect themselves stand united. In this case there is no grey color. Those who stand in the middle in national causes are traitors to their country. There is no choice. We must stand united: all of us are responsible. We should all contribute with words, acts, in any way or form.

The second point, when we talk about differences, we should distinguish between mistake made by individuals and mistakes made institutions. I said this before. Institutions do not commit mistakes except when they adopt mistaken policies. This is a different issue. We have two policies: the first is to proceed in the reform process and the second is to fight terrorism. Can anyone say that this a mistaken policy: I am against reform and support terrorism. This is impossible. I am talking about the Syrian arena. When we put these things aside, what this means is that we stand united with state institutions. We help them, we help the army, we morally embrace the army and the security.

If we go back to the 1970s and 1980s, when the devils' brothers, who covered themselves with Islam, carried out their terrorist acts in Syria. In the beginning there were many Syrians who were misguided. They believed that they were genuinely defending Islam. They didn't take any position. When things became clear decisive acts were taken and it was quick when the people stood with the state at that time. Of course the killing and the assassinations went on for six years. We don't want to wait all that long. Things are clear for all of us. If we stood together and embraced members of the security and other relevant systems, I believe the results will be quick and decisive, because terrorism strikes, and every time it strikes it makes reform more costly and more difficult.

The question is a race between the terrorists and reform. Terrorism and those standing behind it don't want reform and want to reach a stage where we say there is no time for reform. Let's deal with terrorism. In that case they would have an excuse to ask for intervention in Syria. All of us have recently felt, through television, radio and the internet, that people are worried and upset and all of them are calling for decisive action.

Of course, this issue is already settled for us because dealing with terrorism must be in the strongest legal means. We are keen of the law because we are keen at same time on the blood of innocent people. We do not want the price of the fight against terrorism to be the blood of innocent people, but the problem is that they began to hit innocent people. Now, the Syrian people are being killed and political belonging has nothing to do with the person killed even if he is an opponent to the state. They are killing the Syrian people; they are punishing the Syrian people because the Syrian people refused to abandon his morals, refused to become a mercenary and refused to sell his conscience. Thus, it was necessary to punish the Syrian people everywhere.

Therefore, we have to be united and we have to resolve this issue. As I said, the main pillar is how the citizen stands with the state. In some cases when the army entered a city (which controlled by the terrorists), some people from the region's population formed teams to protect the army's flanks in order to enter the city. Some other people in other regions formed observing patrols to prevent terrorists from carrying out acts of murder and sabotage or sedition in some areas. In other areas, they were delivering their information to the army. Thus, we have many ways. I think we should start now a direct dialogue among the concerned authorities in the country, in different regions and different activities to see how we can achieve security on all Syrian territories.

I want just to talk about one point linked to the issue of the national reconciliation because it was raised in this context. I mean if we stand together, where to get then? There are those who proposed at the beginning of the crisis the idea of having a national reconciliation. The national reconciliation at the end of the crisis means that everyone forgives everyone; I mean to say that everyone has committed a mistake against everyone and there are many mistakes. Everyone forgives everyone because revenge does not lead to a positive result. Revenge does not build a country. Revenge does not return the blood spilled and, of course, chaos destroys the homeland as we are witnessing now. Only tolerance builds nations and achieves the flourishing future.

This means that national reconciliation stems from this feeling existing among the citizens, because some people at the beginning of the crisis has proposed national reconciliation. National reconciliation needs a general feeling among citizens that we are closer to the end of the crisis and that we stand undivided in one place. The most important point is who are the parties of such reconciliation? The national reconciliation is among parties, who are the parties? The parties are not specified. Thus, we reach a national reconciliation through national awareness not through a decision taken by the President who shall issue a law and a general amnesty, etc. The state may absolve a party, but what about other parties? It is a national situation that is followed by laws and legislations, etc. Thus, we do need to get to that stage but in a timely manner. Now, as a result of the public awareness which has emerged recently, I see that we can move in this direction with putting an end for terrorism on the Syrian arena.

In order to succeed in all these procedures, reforms, confrontations and complex conditions, we must be cautious of the psychologically defeated people who are seeking to spread the spirit of defeat and frustration among citizens, whether from their psychological reasons or their self-interest considerations. If this bunch of few people decided to contribute to the defeat of the homeland in the virtual squares, the overwhelmingly majority of people have decided to achieve victory in the real squares. National battles have its own squares and men where there is no place for the shaking hands and the frightened hearts. As for their embargo, it will not terrorize and will not be able to humiliate our people because it is not

the Syrian who sells his honor and dignity for money. This is not out of verbal rhetoric but out of the fact that we are the ones who fed many Arab countries during many lean years.

I am talking about the lean years which prevailed three or four year ago. Four countries, as well as the Syrian people, ate Syrian wheat, and we are the ones who developed their industry in the eighties although we did not have any foreign currency reserves. We did not even have a small amount of reserves and, during that time, we could hardly pay the salaries and we hardly had enough wheat for our bread. So we say to the generation who does not remember that stage, and who was probably not born during that phase, do not allow the fear to control your heart as a result of the media war which is targeting you. Syria has undergone much more difficult conditions during which even the security situation was much more difficult. Yet, we bypassed those conditions and were victorious. With all their negatives and misfortunes, crises give opportunities to genuine people to achieve something, and today we are more capable of transforming all that to gains by our self-dependence. If we think scientifically and collectively away from selfishness, this will help us compensate for our loss in the short term and turn them into gains in the long term.

The most important thing is not to have a monopolizing group which makes use of crises to collect their fortunes at the expense of the food and blood of the people. This is an important point. Of course, it is the responsibility of the state to fight this situation and we always instruct institutions to control this issue, but we also know that, under the conditions of disorder, deficiency infiltrates even through institutions, which is yet another obstacle ahead of us. This is a fact but with our cooperation we can find a solution for this issue.

Under these conditions, and regardless of the crisis, we have to concentrate on small and medium enterprises and on handicrafts. First, we need to establish a wide base for job opportunities and to have more social justice. We always talk about the volume of growth but we do not identify the dimensions of the pyramid or the pyramid's base which benefits from this growth. Such industries in addition to handicrafts create great social justice and, at the same time, they do not fall under the influence of external blockade and are not highly influenced by the security conditions. Recently, we have started to focus to a large extent on handicrafts as supporting them in this stage is very necessary.

In agriculture we, in Syria, have made very good steps despite the difficulties, and we have continued to pay attention to the conditions of farmers and workers. But I think that paying attentions to craftspeople and similar professions was not as it should have been.

A great part of the psychological war is launched now against Syria. When they failed in the sectarian issue, they also failed in the national issue. They failed in all the issues which have a political aspect. Then they moved to the economic aspect. Of course, the stock market rates and the exchange rates of the Lira do have an effect, and do we know that when the value of the Lira decreases, prices increase. But this is not the only criteria. There is another criterion which is more important. What is the volume of production in Syria? Production in Syria was generally weak, and over the last few years when we opened our economy we turned to consumption. Even products which exist in Syria are bought from non-Syrian producers. This has very badly damaged the economy. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the level of production in Syria, and we are capable even during this crisis to increase this production. We must know that we have many points of strength. For example, the volume of foreign debt in Syria is very limited, our relations with different countries have been ongoing, and we have olives (I believe that we were the fifth olive producer on the level of the world, and some say that we have even jumped to the third or fourth level,

which I am not sure of).

For us, as a small country, to occupy the fifth position in producing olives and olive oil among hundreds of countries is a very positive thing. We also have a strong presence as a wheat producer, as I said earlier. The land is there, the farmers are there, and the rainfall is there. This means that we have real points of strength but we have to regulate the economic process and we can kick things off even while under the influence of this crisis.

They are trying to depict Syria as an isolated country, trying to stress this over and over again. But our points of strength lie in our strategic position. If they want to besiege Syria, they will end up besieging a whole region. As for our relations with the West, they talk about an international community. This international community is a group of big colonial countries which view the whole world as an arena full of slaves who serve their interests.

For us, the West is important and we cannot deny this truth. But the West today is not like the West a decade ago. The world is changing and there are emerging powers. There are alternatives. It is important but it is not the oxygen which we breathe. If the West closes its doors, we can still breathe. It is not the life buoy without which we drown. We can swim on our own and along our friends and brothers, and there is plenty of them. That is why we decided in 2005 to move eastwards. At that time, we knew that the West will never change. The West is still colonial in one way or another. It is changing from an old colonizer to a modern colonizer and from a modern colonizer during the Sykes-Picot agreement to a contemporary colonizer. It has different forms and shapes but it will never change, which means that we have to turn to the East. We, as a state, started this procedure several years ago, and my visits during the recent years fell under that initiative in one way or another. But this is not sufficient. The private sector must also open channels with those countries.

Most countries of the world have good relations with Syria, and they insisted on having good relations with us even under the conditions of the current crisis and the Western pressures on them. All this does not mean that we will not pay a price or there will not be loss as a result of the blockade, on one hand, and the political and security situation, on another. However, we can have achievements which could reduce the effects of the damages. At this stage, there fundamental points which make all these achievements closely related to the security situation including incidents of highway robbery, and the issues of gas and diesel. For example, we might have to cancel a train shipment and transport the diesel, fuel, or gas by vehicles, which makes the cost higher and the transported amount smaller; and this does not fulfill the citizens' needs of consumption or the consumption needs of electricity power stations or other systems. Our entire livelihood is now linked to controlling the security situation. That is why I reiterated the importance of this so that we can all cooperate in putting an end to it, and so that, we, as a state, do not break our commitments towards our citizens. Security, economy, and all other issues are indispensable things for the Syrian citizen.

Despite all those complex circumstances, I am greatly confident of the future. My confidence is inspired by you, and by your throats which hailed glory, dignity, and defiance when millions of you filled tens of cities and squares along the country. I say to you I, as you have always known me, am one of you. When we do not face up to the challenges, we do not deserve the name of Syria; and when we do not dare to defend it or cannot defend it against its enemies, we do not deserve to live on its soil. Our people has proven its genuineness and sincerity when the bloody media machine fell short of destroying its unity and when the starvation attempts did not make it kneel and could not taint its honour and

dignity. A people with such sophisticated feelings of belonging to their home country, with such high morals which face the most dangerous crises, and with such strong faith in its ability to overcome those decisive moments in its history will not allow a small group of frauds or delusional people to make it stray from the road of truth and righteousness; and it will not allow groups that sold themselves to the devil of pernicious desires and dubious interests to destroy what it has built over a long history of effort and sacrifice.

My confidence in that is inspired by you and the men of our armed forces, the men of living conscience and strong resolve. They are the ones who truly express the feelings of the people, safeguard its values and aspirations, and give all sacrifices in order for the people to enjoy security. On your behalf, and on the behalf of every honourable citizen, I would like to greet them as they stand ready to protect the honor of their country, and the integrity of its soil and people. As for our martyrs' blood which is behind the steadfastness of our country, it will always be the lightship that will light the road of our next generations to build the future Syria. Because when their blood waters the land, it will make it bear the fruits of a more secure tomorrow, unity and freedom for us all. As for the strength of their families who lost their dearest people, it has made us firmer and more determined and persistent in following on the same road which was taken by their brothers, fathers, and sons in defense of their country and its values, no matter how expensive the price is and to be as an example for all of us on how an individual dies in order for the country to live.

I would like to salute you, the sons of this great people, with all your intellectual, and political doctrines, you who strongly and unyieldingly defend the values of solidarity and love that unify our people against the feelings of malice and hatred which some try to invoke spreading their poisons all over the country, and you who work relentlessly in order to develop our country, regain its security, enhance its unity, and protect its sovereignty. And glory to our proud people who reject defeat in the age of collapse and who say to their enemies, 'never will we be defeated!' For you, our proud people, we are persistent, and with your support, we continue to resist and win, and we will insha' Allah win, and the peace and mercy of God be upon you all.

English Bulletin

H.E. President Bashar Al-Assad reiterated one day after His landmark speech Syria's determination to steadily go ahead with the ongoing reform process.

In a spontaneous word to the tens of thousands of the Syrians, who gathered since the early hours of the morning at Umayyad Square, President Al-Assad underscored that Syria is also to steadily go forward in fighting terrorism.

"We are to be victorious ,with and by you, against the conspiracy," said President Al-Assad to the jubilant Syrians, who hoist the Syrian flag, his posters, and national banners.

"I met you to derive the power in the face of what Syria is being exposed to," added President Al-Assad, highly lauding the Syrians' awareness, power, and strength as the "compass" leading to the correct path.

"I have strong desire to be here with you at al-Umayyad Square , in the heart of Damascus, the capital of the Umayyads, Resistance, Civilization, the blessed Bilad al-Sham, which they wanted for to be transferred from the land of harmony, amity, and peace to a land which

they plant with destruction, killing, and wreckage,” said H.E. President Al-Assad to the high applause, chants and slogans of love, loyalty and allegiance to his leadership.

“I do feel the same love to you as you feel towards me. I wish that God would have granted me a very big heart capable to give the more of amity and love to this great people,” President Al-Assad emotionally addressed the Syrians.

President Al-Assad voiced pleasure at his meeting and direct talk to the Syrian citizens, appreciating the Syrians’ pride, strength, steadfastness, dignity, which “give high morale to every official”.

“I salute you while you get out from Mosques, churches, schools and universities as to stand against westernization and to support Arabization, and assert the role of your institutions, on top of which the institution of the Army and Armed Forces, whose martyrs are every day martyred so that we are secure and free,” underscored President Al-Assad.

“we do trust the future, put trust in you, and through you we are to be victorious against the conspiracy,” added President Al-Assad, lashing out at the conspirators who are in the final phase of their conspiracies.

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