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**STATEMENT
by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. LAVROV,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,
at the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly**

September 28, 2012

Distinguished Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

For over a year and a half the situation in the Middle East and North Africa has been a nerve knot of the global politics. The deep changes that have swept over the region, intertwine with the key problems of the modern international relations and require everyone to use a comprehensive approach, to reject simplified and ideology-driven patterns and double standards.

Russia consistently supports the peoples in their aspiration to determine their destiny by themselves, and to pave the way to more effective models of public governance. We believe it is particularly important to carry out those transformations in a non-violent way and without outside interference. We strongly believe that all the

members of the international community should be interested in making the MENA peaceful, stable, democratic, and free from domestic and inter-State conflicts. So far, however, there has been no progress in reaching the unanimity in the efforts of outside players to create conditions for achieving that goal.

Of particular concern is the deepening of internal conflict in Syria. We have consistently called for consolidated efforts of the international community to compel the government and its opponents to immediately cease the violence and come to the negotiating table and to elaborate a compromise on the content and pace of the reforms that would satisfy all Syrians and ensure safety and the rights of all ethnic and religious groups. This is the substance of the consensus recorded in the Geneva communiqué of the Action Group agreed upon as follow-up of the Kofi Annan Plan.

We call upon all members of the Action Group to fully confirm the commitments that all of us have taken on in Geneva. This is the shortest way to stop the loss of human life in Syria. We proposed to adopt a resolution in the UN Security Council that would endorse the Geneva communiqué as the basis for negotiations at the beginning of the transitional period, but this proposal had been blocked. Those who oppose the implementation of the Geneva communiqué take upon themselves an enormous responsibility. They insist on a ceasefire only by the government and encourage the opposition to intensify hostilities – but in fact they push Syria even deeper in the abyss of bloody intestine strife. The militarization of conflict is continuing with the calls for an open intervention. The extremist organizations including Al-Qaeda have become more active in Syria – they perpetrate terrorist attacks against innocent civilians and civil infrastructure. The number of war crimes is growing – both on the side of the government forces and opposition, as it has been recorded in the recent report of the commission of the UN Human Rights Council.

Russia resolutely condemns any violence, wherever it comes from, and is convinced that there is still an opportunity to undertake collective actions. Practical

steps to overcome the crisis need to begin with a comprehensive ceasefire, release of prisoners and hostages and supply of additional humanitarian aid. This will create conditions to start an inter-Syrian dialogue. We hope that the experience of special UN-Arab League representative Lakhdar Brahimi will help agree on such arrangements with the support of the international community. Russia will provide its full support to ensure the success of his mission.

The transformations in the Middle East should not marginalize the Palestinian problem. The achievement of a comprehensive, just and durable Arab-Israeli settlement that should lead, among other results, to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security with Israel, would become a major contribution to normalization of the overall regional situation. The Arab Peace Initiative fully retains its relevance, and we support the efforts of the League of Arab States to move it forward.

I also wish to stress that it is important to implement the decision on convening in 2012 the Conference on establishing in the Middle East of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and means of their delivery. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to ensure participation in the Conference of all States of the region that should agree on key arrangements among themselves. In this regard, the League of Arab States is called to play an important role.

On the whole, we support closer ties between the UN and regional entities. I would note that in our part of the world today a memorandum on cooperation was signed between the CSTO Secretariat and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. I am convinced that this will increase the efficiency of common efforts to ensure stability and security.

All our actions should rely on a solid basis of the UN Charter, where nothing provides for the right to change regimes. It is unacceptable to impose a political

system of a country on its people. This was clearly stated by President Vladimir Putin speaking at the Kremlin on 26 September.

All the sequence of events in the Arab world and in other regions proves the futility of such a policy that can lead to dangerous accumulation of interethnic and inter-religious clashes in international relations. We believe it is an obligation of all States to protect from provocations and blasphemy the religious feelings of people of any religious affiliation. At the same time, there can be no justification to the acts of terror, regardless of where they are committed – be it in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen or anywhere else. Attacks against diplomats or UN personnel are absolutely unacceptable.

In general, we are convinced that today when the world lives through a transition period that is characterized by instability in the spheres of economy, politics or inter-civilizational relations, it is particularly important for the UN member States to be able to rely on accepted rules of conduct, and to agree on a joint response to the threats to global stability. We should not allow irresponsible actions dictated by expedient interests to shatter the system of international law. The world order is threatened by arbitrary interpretation of such essential principles as non-use or threat of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs.

These are the key principles of the UN Charter, which confers the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security on the Security Council. In advancing the reform of the United Nations, it is necessary to preserve the capacity of the Security Council to perform these functions. Their erosion would deprive the international community of an essential mechanism for elaboration of joint approaches to the settlement of crisis situations.

It is appropriate to mention the compulsory instruments at the disposal of the United Nations. Imposition of sanctions under the UN Charter is attributed to the

competence of the Security Council. Decisions must be made on a collegial basis with the understanding that sanctions should not lead to isolation of that or another State, but rather encourage it to engage in a dialogue in order to remove questions that the UN member States may have. It is essential that the sanctions should be well-measured, and they should not cause any suffering to the population. In the past the UN Security Council discussed the issue of humanitarian limits of sanctions, but somehow the discussions faded away. We believe it is important to resume them.

There is another issue to be discussed in the Security Council – consequences of unilateral sanctions imposed by a State or a group of States sidestepping the United Nations to advance their political goals. We have no doubt that such sanctions, especially when they are applied ex-territorially, weaken the unity of the international community and undermine the effectiveness of its efforts.

For many years, the trade and economic, and financial restrictions imposed by the United States against Cuba have remained an illustration of negative impact of unilateral sanctions. Russia, together with the overwhelming majority of members of the international community, calls for an earliest lift of this blockade, as a relict of the Cold War.

Special attention should be given to practical enforcement of the Security Council's decisions on sanctions against non-State actors and illegal trans-border formations.

In general, the events of the recent years have clearly shown that unilateral actions that violate international law and go beyond the decisions of the UN Security Council or distort the substance of these decisions do not do any good.

Of course, the legal norms in international affairs will be further adjusted as necessary. But these transformations should be treated with utmost responsibility and full realization of serious risks associated with them. Only consensus can be the

criterion for their adoption. Violations of international law should not be portrayed as their “creative development”.

All of the above has also to do with the debate regarding the concept of “responsibility to protect”. Its further discussion should be held on the basis of the approaches agreed upon at the UN Summit in 2005 that reaffirmed the need to observe the principles of the UN Charter with regard to response to intra-State conflicts. Protection of civilians is an issue, which is too serious to be exploited for achieving political goals. The ambiguity of the “responsibility to protect” concept can be better understood in light of initiatives formulated by Brazil and several other States to help move forward to a consensus.

Let us not forget that the UN founding fathers in their wisdom agreed upon and endorsed the United Nations Charter that enshrined the principles for regulation of the multi-polar world order. Now, when the abnormal bipolar period of the Cold War is over, and when it has become obvious for everyone that there is no place for unipolarity in the modern world, and that the international reality can be only polycentric, we have a unique chance to fully implement the original potential of the UN Charter.

This is a hard challenge. International relations are clearly experiencing a lack of credibility. We regard this as the main obstacle to practical progress towards the establishment of universal foundations of equal and indivisible security – be it in the Euro-Atlantic area, the Asia-Pacific region or other parts of the world. Such a state of affairs clearly contradicts the concept of collective security embodied in the UN Charter, and the deep interdependence of the modern world where the majority of challenges and threats are common for all and have a cross-border dimension.

Strengthening of confidence and collective principles in the international life with the emphasis on negotiating pursuit for compromise solutions would help substantially reduce the level of instability and move forward in the settlement of

crisis situations not only in the Middle East, but also around Iran, Afghanistan, in the Korean peninsula and throughout the world.

The final goal of the efforts to settle a conflict is to ensure the right to life and other fundamental human rights: political, economic and social. The events of the recent years confirm that without lasting peace and sustainable development, it is impossible to ensure human rights. In its turn, the protection of human rights should contribute to security and development of people rather than serve as a pretext for illegal interference in the domestic affairs of States.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to an international order in which their rights can be fully realized. Those who use military force and sanctions bypassing the UN Charter or engage in illicit supplies of arms, or whitewash terrorists grossly violate this right.

Russia stands for the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and respect for traditional values on which the human civilization is based and where all world religions converge. This is a moral foundation of the modern society, the "cement" that bonds nations and peoples.

In the recent years these values have been undergoing trials caused by manifestations of immorality, extremism and racial intolerance. Another matter of concern is the even more assertive actions of those who claiming the freedom of speech connive the glorification of Nazis and their accomplices, and desecrate the memory of the victims of the World War II and the victors of Fascism. Such actions are incompatible with the obligations of States under the UN Charter.

Let me recall that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights directly prohibits the propaganda of war and incitement of national and religious discord. This means that the freedom of speech and assembly cannot be used as justification for propaganda of Nazi or other radical or extremist views in violation of basic principles and norms of international law.

Yesterday, the UN Human Rights Council endorsed Russia-proposed resolution on interrelation of human rights and traditional values. It is regrettable that a number of Western States voted against this document, which is especially relevant today.

The progress towards a true partnership in international relations is possible only on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The course of events in the world leaves no alternative to anyone but to join efforts in order to build a stable, equitable and democratic international system. It would be possible to resist this objective trend and try to preserve the old order for a while. But such resistance will cost new lives, suffering and destruction. Let us display our vision and instead of looking back at the history of previous centuries, take the side of the history that is unfolding before us now and requires a lot of collective statesmanship.