



27 September 2012 – European leaders today urged the United Nations not to be put off by setbacks in the Arab Spring that overthrew long-entrenched dictatorships on the continent’s doorstep, and called for increased support for peoples seeking to build democracy.

“We in Europe, geographically so close, and with our societies so deeply involved with those in the countries experiencing these upheavals, we were also acutely aware that the changes, and the risks and opportunities that lay ahead, would directly affect us as neighbours,” President Herman Van Rompuy of the European Council [told](#) the General Assembly.

“Of course expectations ran high. It was tempting to read the events in Tunis or Cairo as the opening pages of a fairytale,” he said on the second day (26 September) of the 67th Assembly’s General Debate, alluding to violence that has shaken some of the countries of the Arab Spring, as well as the ferocious fighting that is continuing in Syria.

He underscored the importance of tolerance and freedom of speech. Violence and killings, such as that of United States Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, can never be justified regardless of their motivations, he said. Along with others, Ambassador Stevens died in violence that erupted in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi, reportedly in reaction to an anti-Islam video made in the US. Other countries across North Africa and the Middle East experiences similar violent reactions.



In his [statement](#) to the General Debate, the United Kingdom's Prime Minister David Cameron also called for patience.

"Some believe that the Arab Spring is in danger of becoming an Arab Winter," he told the Assembly, citing the riots, Syria's descent into civil war, frustration at the lack of economic progress and the emergence of newly elected Islamist-led governments.

"But they are in danger of drawing the wrong conclusion. Today is not the time to turn back, but to keep the faith and redouble our support for open societies and for people's demands for a job and a voice," he added. "We in the United Nations must step up our efforts to support the people of these countries as they build their own democratic future."

The UK leader noted the "huge and sobering" challenges ahead, noting the "despicable" murder of Mr. Stevens and the danger of violent extremists exploiting the political transition.

"Islam is a great religion observed peacefully and devoutly by over a billion people. Islamist extremism is a warped political ideology supported by a minority that seeks to hijack a great religion to gain respectability for its violent objectives," he said, and, citing Turkey as an example, added that, "democracy and Islam can flourish alongside each other."

Prime Minister Cameron denounced the horrific atrocities that he said President Assad had inflicted on his own people, including children. "The blood of these young children is a terrible stain on the reputation of this United Nations," he said.



In his [remarks](#) to the General Debate, Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti noted that there was an element of self-interest in the support his country and the European Union are lending to the new governments of the Arab Spring.

“Instability around the Mediterranean impacts our own society,” he told the General Assembly.

“Conflicts and social unrest on the southern shore spill over to our own shores. Terrorism finds a new avenue to reach Europe. Trafficking in human beings has destabilizing effects on the countries of destination and often results in tragedies at sea that we can no longer accept,” he added, stressing Italy’s full support for Mr. Brahimi’s mission.

The European leaders are among the scores of heads of State and government and other high-level officials who are presenting their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance at the Assembly’s General Debate, which ends on 1 October.