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Onderwerp: 6th annual meeting of the SI Presidium and Heads of State and Government, United Nations, New York

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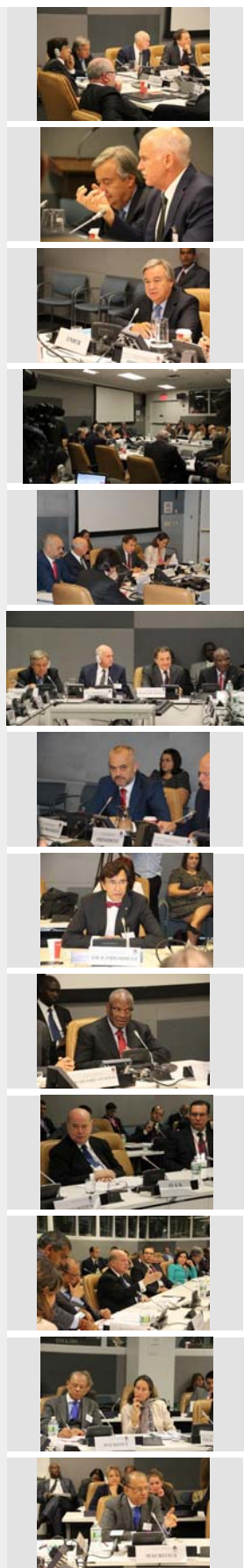
6th annual meeting of the SI Presidium and Heads of State and Government, United Nations, New York

26 SEPTEMBER 2013



Members of the SI Presidium, heads of state and government from SI member parties, heads of UN agencies and international organisations and a number of foreign ministers gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York for the 6th annual meeting in conjunction with the UN General Assembly. The main themes of the meeting were the latest developments in the struggles to gain new democracies in the world, as in Syria and Egypt, with a particular focus on peace, security and human rights; and the social democratic commitment to end poverty and to equality, incorporating our contribution to the post-2015 Development Agenda.

Heads of state and government present included the recently-elected President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, prime ministers Elio Di Rupo (Belgium) and Edi Rama (Albania), both SI vice-presidents, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, prime minister of Mauritius, and Joseph Muscat, prime minister of Malta. António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the



Organisation of American States, participated as special invited guests. The meeting was chaired by SI President George Papandreou, with participating members of the Presidium comprising SI Secretary General Luis Ayala, and SI vice-presidents Victor Benoit (Haiti), Nouzha Chekrouni (Morocco), Ahmed Ould Daddah (Mauritania), Alfred Gusenbauer (Austria), Ouafa Hajji (SIW), Eero Heinäluoma (Finland), Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana (Namibia), Chantal Kambiwa (Cameroon), Marian Lupu (Moldova), Mario Nalpatian (Armenia), Juliao Mateus Paulo (Angola), Henry Ramos (Venezuela), Ségolène Royal (France), Sandra Torres (Guatemala), Miguel Vargas Maldonado (Dominican Republic) and Carlos Vieira da Cunha (Brazil). A number of other senior government officials were also present: Manuel Vicente, vice-president of Angola, Titus Corlatean, minister of foreign affairs of Romania, Zlatko Lagumdžija, minister of foreign affairs of Bosnia & Herzegovina, and George Rebelo Chicoty, minister of foreign affairs of Angola.

The Presidium paid tribute at the opening of the meeting to the Ghanaian poet, activist and diplomat Kofi Awoonor, who was tragically killed during the recent terror attack in Nairobi. Awoonor, who headed the delegation of the National Democratic Congress to the XXIV SI Congress in Cape Town, was a source of inspiration for many and will live on through the legacy of his work, and those present agreed to convey a message of condolence to the NDC from the Socialist International.

In the context of the focus of the meeting on the struggle to gain new democracies and the pursuit of peace and security, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres presented the plight of Syrian refugees, painting an extraordinarily detailed and in many ways bleak picture of the refugee crisis and regional destabilisation that have been provoked by the civil war. Over two million refugees have been individually registered outside of Syrian borders, with many more internally displaced. Neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon, are suffering very damaging political, security and humanitarian consequences. The high commissioner's contribution underlined the urgency with which a peaceful resolution to the conflict must be found. The Socialist International has been vocal in its support for those in Syria seeking a free, democratic and secure future, and participants in the meeting added their contributions, expressing the hope that further progress could be made through the auspices of the United Nations.

Members of the Presidium warmly congratulated President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita on his comprehensive triumph in the recently-held presidential elections in Mali, and were united in conveying their best wishes for success in the difficult and crucial tasks he and his country will face. President Keita thanked all those present for their support during an extremely troubled time for his country. He expressed his pride at belonging to a political family that was so warm, welcoming and human, and he pledged to remain an active participant in the SI's activities. Other speakers referred to the important role of solidarity as a key value of the global social democratic movement. Strong support had been shown from the SI and its member parties to Mali, a good example of this being the mission of the SI to that country during the elections. It was stressed that an important commitment to the ongoing strength and relevance of the organisation was the continued participation of those leaders once they reached government.

During discussions under the theme of the social democratic commitment to end poverty and to equality, it was acknowledged that the Millennium Development Goals would not be met in the majority of cases, and a great deal still had to be done on poverty, health and gender equality.

Poverty and hunger remain social democratic priorities, with different challenges faced



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in different regions of the world. In Europe for example, gains made in social welfare since the Second World War are now under threat from over-zealous and ideologically-motivated austerity plans which aim to dismantle the welfare state, whereas in Latin America efforts must be renewed to ensure that growth benefits more than the wealthiest few, with the continent described as 'not poor, but unequal'.

Progress on poverty in Africa is threatened by conflict. Though democracy was able to prevail in Mali, such conflicts continue in many African countries and sincere concern was expressed that the ongoing crises in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Somalia were escaping any meaningful international attention and falling under the radar.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women, another of the MDGs, has also been a key focus of the SI, and the need for equal gender representation within the organisation was reiterated.

The ongoing and future initiatives of the SI, as well as the emphases and priorities of the organisation were also on the agenda of the meeting. The Presidium reviewed the activities of the organisation in an extremely busy period since the last Council in Lisbon, during which the decisions taken by the Council have translated into a number of committee meetings, missions, delegations and initiatives.

Several interventions mentioned the recent revelations regarding the interception of private electronic data by security agencies. It was agreed that this was a serious threat to personal freedoms upon which the SI needed to take a stand in order to protect the citizens of the world from intrusive and indiscriminate surveillance, an unacceptable curbing of civil liberties in the name of counter-terrorism. A particular matter for concern was the extent of US espionage of Brazil, with presidential phone calls, embassies and commercial interests among the targets. It was agreed that the issue should be addressed in a statement to be adopted at the forthcoming Council, with the recognition that those who have experienced life under dictatorships were very wary of such monitoring tactics which were a way for authoritarian regimes to maintain control.

On the issue of espionage and surveillance, as in so many other areas, democratic oversight is of paramount importance. The need to continue to work according to social democratic values and principles, and the responsibility of member parties in government to offer support and solidarity to those facing a democratic deficit were underlined. Recent events, including the coup in Egypt, have drawn attention to fundamental issues surrounding legitimacy and the need to defend freedoms and protect human rights. As the International has stated, a coup is out of step with democracy and there is today an urgent need for Egypt to take once more the path to full democratisation.

Acknowledging the divergent paths taken by Egypt, Libya and Tunisia since their revolutions in 2011, it was proposed that labelling the uprisings collectively as the 'Arab spring' could be seen as applying a convenient label which fails to account for the massive differences between the national situations in different countries. The overwhelming importance of democracy was nonetheless emphasised by all those present, as democracy can for example give not only North Africa, but the whole continent, the chance to take its destiny into its own hands and to overcome language and ethnic differences. The SI must continue to promote negotiated, multilateral, peaceful solutions to conflict situations in the world, in line with its commitment to democracy and desire to bring an end to violence. In this context, the meeting took

positive note of recent statements by the organisation addressing developments in Syria and Egypt.

The ever-critical subject of migration would be an area for future initiatives of the International. Migration is an issue that affects the vast majority of countries in the world, whether concerning the situation of those fleeing violence and persecution and the effect on receiving countries, or the daily hardships and threats faced by many migrants living in irregular conditions.

The Presidium decided that the next SI Council meeting would take place in Istanbul on 11-12 November 2013, hosted by the Republican People's Party (CHP), with special emphasis on current crises related to the struggles for democracy, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, and conflicts threatening peace and security. It will equally include discussions to reaffirm the centre-left vision for the global economy with an emphasis on growth, jobs and equality, and for a new development agenda.



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