

by Ahmed Shebani

As the no-fly zone is declared by the United Nations, and Gaddafi attempts to "divide and rule" Europe by announcing a so-called cease fire, Libyans striving for freedom have to speak now because if we do not it will be too late to create a new democracy in our country.

Sadly we Libyans are not yet well versed in democracy; we have not experienced any form of democratic rule since Gaddafi's coup in 1969. Gaddafi has deliberately and systematically destroyed Libya's entire constitutional and legal structures. This is why the Libyan Freedom and Democracy Campaign (LFDC) expresses doubts about the Interim National Council (INC), and especially its composition, and why we propose the alternative route of the Adrian Pelt commission, which I described in my article here on 15th March.

Sentimentality and the sense of euphoria caused by the expectation of Gaddafi's imminent downfall must not blind us to the painful fact that Gaddafi is not the only dictator in Libya and the end of him will not necessarily lead to the end of dictatorship in the country. The young men and women of the Libyan revolution want the downfall of the whole regime and not only of its head.

The pursuit of a legitimate and more representative INC is part and parcel of the revolution's quest for democracy. We cannot compromise on the principles of legitimacy and accountability which the INC in its present form largely lacks. Democracy is based on pluralism, for it is the political mechanism that accommodates all political differences of opinion without excluding anybody from the political process. In a democracy such differences do not result in disunity nor discord; rather they are the basis of unity and strength itself. It is dictatorship which stifles the freedoms of thought and expression but this simple fact is yet to become part of our political culture.

All need to learn that those who hold different opinions to our own are not our enemies - the democratic concept of loyal opposition. Unfortunately, the INC claims to be the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people which flies in the face of pluralism and democracy the people have not elected the INC. It is true that in the liberated parts of Libya there is a need for an interim administrative body to lead the revolution and to manage the day to day public affairs of the people, but this is a far cry from the INC claim of speaking on behalf of all Libyans.

It is currently seeking international recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people. Such status should only be claimed by a democratically elected government which the INC clearly is not. What the INC is doing is infringing on the sovereignty of the people, the very holy grail of the democracy. The recognition by France of the INC as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people was a dangerous precedent that showed that France was not really interested in democracy in Libya. The French appear to be only interested in doing business with whoever happens to be in power. On the other hand, the British Ambassador to the UN has recently stated that the British government does not recognize interim political

entities. "Governments recognize governments".

The more measured recognition of the INC as a legitimate NEGOTIATOR by the European Union does not in any way infringe on the sovereignty of the Libyan people. We commend it and we see it as the way forward. But if the power of the INC remains unchecked, and if it succeeds to power over the whole of Libya, it will not bring about democracy, for the democrats are the servants of the people. They do not appoint themselves as the sole legitimate representatives of the people. Indeed Gaddafi from day one insisted he spoke on behalf of the people. He still does after almost 42 years in power.

Libya does not have a constitution. It does not have political parties nor any civil society to speak of, so if the power of the INC remains unchecked, it will be too late to remove them from power later on. The nature of power is to expand and to destroy all those who stand in its way. The political conditions in Libya now are conducive to more dictatorship. This is why democrats must stand their ground. The present composition of the INC is very telling. All its senior members used to serve Gaddafi faithfully. They were Gaddafi's tools of tyranny. How can we possibly trust them with the destiny of our beloved Libya?

Once the whole of Libya is liberated we seek to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission so that all of Gaddafi's senior aides and ministers will appear before it. It will be a necessary process of national healing. Only then will the people know the truth, and democracy will take its course.

The Libyan Freedom and Democracy Campaign proposes that the Security Council of the United Nations mandates an Adrian Pelt commission to fill the dangerous political and legal vacuum that will ensue after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. The commission will oversee that the transition to democracy in Libya will be orderly, peaceful and irreversible.

LFDC welcomes the long overdue no-fly zone and it has to be coupled with immediate pre-emptive surgical strikes at key installations in order to reduce significantly Gaddafi's military capabilities to attack civilians. A democratic Libya will not be good for the Libyans only, but it will also be good for regional peace and genuine normalisation.