

# Regime Changes and Uprisings in the Middle East and Parts of North Africa: Some Lessons to be Learnt

Dr. Rufai Muftau

Department of Public Law and Jurisprudence, Faculty of Law, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

## Abstract

The event leading to the death of Mohammed Bouzazi in Tunisia in 2009 brought to light the dehumanized conditions which an average Tunisian had been subjected to at the hands of the Tunisian government. The death of Bouzazi led to street protests and demonstrations by thousands of demonstrators, calling for political reforms, free speech, improved conditions of living, etc. in Tunisia. As a result of this, the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali came to an end. With this success, citizens of other neighbouring countries in North Africa that had similar problems went to the streets asking for reform changes in their countries. These countries include Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, etc. What later on followed is now history. Therefore, in this work, an overview of the events that led to the uprisings in the affected countries would be looked into. The aftermaths of these uprisings are no doubt what one should ponder upon. This is with a view to analysing the lessons to be learnt from these uprisings so as to avoid a repeat of it in future. Therefore, recommendations are made, followed by a concluding remark of the work.

**Keywords:** Regime, Changes, Uprising, Revolution, Middle East, Africa

## 1. Introduction

The paper focuses on regime changes in the Middle East and parts of Africa and some lessons to be learnt for future reforms in the affected areas and other parts of the world. As it is often said, nothing is permanent, but change, itself. Change is part of human lives, thus, the society in which we live is not static. In this context, change is synonymous with revolution, reform, freedom, etc. It is therefore not strange to see changes or reforms manifest in the society. The earliest form of contemporary changes or reforms in human history is the French revolution of 1789. The consequence of this was that the monarchy and the old privileged aristocracy paved way for creation of a new state. In discussing this revolution or any other one that is known to human history, the root causes of changes in the affected society is that the conditions are often very bad and unbearable, thereby resulting in the general public overthrowing the status quo by violence.

In Africa, there are recorded cases of changes in form of revolution, coups and counter-coups. Examples of these include Nigeria, Ghana, Congo, Libya, etc. The causes of such changes vary from one country to another, but most often the general conditions must have been so unbearable, consequent upon which the people take up arms against the constituted authorities. After all, the general saying is that all men will not risk anything for nothing.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to bring into focus the regime changes in parts of the Middle East and North Africa<sup>1</sup> vis-a-vis the short and long time effects the changes would have on the lives of the citizenry of the affected countries on one hand and on the entire continent on the other hand. In specific terms, the countries where such changes have occurred include Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, etc. To this effect, the paper is discussed under the following headings:

- a. The uprisings in parts of the Middle East and North Africa.
- b. Some causes of the uprisings.
- c. Aftermath of the uprisings.
- d. Offences committed during the uprisings and the need for prosecution.
- e. Lessons learnt from the uprisings.
- f. A concluding remark of the work.

## 2.0 The Uprisings in parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

The paper begins with the Tunisian uprising.

### 2.1 Tunisian Uprising

It was a campaign of civil uprising together with some series of street demonstrations in Tunisia. The demonstrations occurred as a result of high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, lack of freedom of speech and other political freedoms etc. All these together were fuelled by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on 17/12/2010.<sup>2</sup> Mohammed, a sole income earner in a family of eight had a problem with the police. His cart

<sup>1</sup>. Some of these changes are inevitable in view of the leadership styles that are manifest in parts of Middle East and Africa.

<sup>2</sup>. See Aljazeera News of 17/12/2011.

and produce were confiscated. In an attempt to pay the 10 dinar fine, the police slapped him and spat in his face. He went to the Provincial Head quarter to make a complaint, but he was denied audience. This infuriated him and so set himself ablaze. This event led to riot the following day, and he died on 4/1/11. Consequent upon this event, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted on 14/1/11, when he officially resigned after fleeing to Saudi Arabia, ending the 23 years of his regime.<sup>1</sup>

With this development, a state of emergency was declared and a caretaker coalition government was created among which was Ben Ali's party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), and that elections would take place within 60 days. Other events which took place would be discussed in the middle of this work. It may however be added that the Constituent Assembly elections did take place on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2011, a result of which showed that An-Nahda, an Islamic Fundamentalist Party won the election by 217 to 96.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Egyptian Uprising

It is a common knowledge that the events in Tunisia had a great influence in the Egyptian uprising which in turn led to the ousting of the long-time President Hosni Mubarak. He became the president following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, and continued to rule till 2011. He maintained a one party rule under a continuous emergency rule. He was able to rule for 30 years because of the support of the USA<sup>3</sup> and the West. He maintained policies of suppression towards the Islamic militants, but made peace with the State of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The protest began on 25/1/11, when the opposition groups set aside the day as a day of revolt, a day which coincided with the National Police Day. The aim was to protest against human rights abuses that were committed by the police in front of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>5</sup> Other demands include the resignation of the Minister of Interior, restoration of a fair minimum wage, an end of the Egyptian Emergency Law<sup>6</sup> and time limits for the President,<sup>7</sup> freedom for political movements, etc.<sup>8</sup> Both the opposition parties and the public figures also supported this uprising<sup>9</sup> as they also complained of high level of corruption by the Egyptian government officials,<sup>10</sup> etc.

What was however instrumental to the uprising in Egypt was the video blog posted two weeks before the National Police Day in which a girl urged all Egyptians to join her on 25/1/11 in Tahrir square to bring down the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. This demonstration led to other demonstrations in Cairo and other cities in Egypt. Therefore, on 11/2/2011, Omar Suleiman, the former Egyptian Vice President announced the resignation of President Mubarak, entrusting the Supreme Council of Egyptian Armed Forces with the leadership of the country.<sup>11</sup> Other subsequent events would be discussed in the body of this work.

## 2.3 Libyan Uprising

It is referred to as the Libyan revolution or conflict which was fought between forces loyal to Muhammad Gaddafi and the freedom fighters that sought to, and indeed ousted the government of Muhammad Gaddafi on 20/10/11. The event in Libya started on 15/2/11 when the civil society went on riot and demonstration, but was met with stiff resistance by the Gaddafi government through the Libyan Army. This led to killings of many civilians and members of the freedom fighters. The fights started in Tripoli, but escalated and spread across major cities in the country like Benghazi, Misrata, Sirte, etc. Thereafter, the freedom fighters established the National Transitional Council (NTC),<sup>12</sup> the aim of which was to overthrow the government of Muhammad Gaddafi and hold democratic elections.<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad Gaddafi came to power through a military coup that overthrew King Idris in 1969. While on

---

<sup>1</sup>. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was able to stay in power up to that period because of the supports he received from the US and France.

<sup>2</sup>. See Aljazeera News of 24/10/2011.

<sup>3</sup>. A good example of this support was the annual aid he received from the USA.

<sup>4</sup>. The peace treaty with the state of Israel is in respect of Camp David Accord of 1979.

<sup>5</sup>. These form the basis of the charges filed against former president Hosni Mubarak and other members of his cabinet.

<sup>6</sup>. See the Emergency law, No. 162 of 1958. In general, the law extended police powers, suspension of constitutional rights, censorship of the press, imprisonment of individuals indefinitely without trial, etc.

<sup>7</sup>. It could be recalled that from all indications, Mubarak had groomed his son to succeed him.

<sup>8</sup>. As a one party state, oppositions in Egypt were not given political freedom.

<sup>9</sup>. The Leftis, the National Progressive Unionist Party and the Catholic Church did not join the uprising.

<sup>10</sup>. This is especially the case with President Hosni Mubarak, members of his family and others close to him.

<sup>11</sup>. See Aljazeera News of 11/2/2011.

<sup>12</sup>. Many countries in Africa including Nigeria announced their recognition of the NTC as the legitimate representatives of the people of Libya, even though AU refused this recognition. The UN also gave its recognition to the NTC.

<sup>13</sup>. Since the time Muhammad Gaddafi came into power in 1969, there had never been any presidential election. In fact, the country knew nothing about any political elections or reforms of any sort throughout his regime.

the throne, he abolished the Libyan constitution and came out with his manifesto known as the Green Book. With Muhammad Gaddafi as a ceremonial ruler, Libya was officially run by a system of people's committees which served as local governments for the country's subdivisions; an indirectly elected General People Congress as the Legislature, and the General Peoples Committee, led by a Secretary General, at the branch. This was how the country was governed by Muhammad Gaddafi until he was captured and killed on 20/10/2011.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the causes of the uprising include agitation for political reforms,<sup>2</sup> stoppage of human rights violations,<sup>3</sup> freedom of the press, curbing corruption,<sup>4</sup> unemployment<sup>5</sup> and poor living conditions of the citizenry,<sup>6</sup> etc.

At the earlier stage of the protests, the UN passed a resolution on 26/10/11, freezing the assets of Muammar Gaddafi and his close associates, and restricted their air travels. A further UN resolution authorised member states to establish and enforce no fly zone over Libya. And with the heavy bombardments of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi was captured and killed on 20/10/11, putting an end to the 42 years old regime of his government.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4 Syrian Uprising

The riot started on 26/1/11 and escalated into an uprising by 15/3/11. The demands of the protesters are that President Bashar al-Assad should step down.<sup>8</sup> The protesters also demanded for broad political freedom such as freedom of the press, speech and assembly,<sup>9</sup> curbing corruption,<sup>10</sup> improved living conditions of the citizenry,<sup>11</sup> etc.

Like the movements in Tunisia and Egypt, the events in Syria took the form of protests of various types such as marching round the cities, hunger strikes, vandalization of government properties, etc. Though, still on-going, many innocent civilians and members of the opposition parties had been killed<sup>12</sup> and yet Assad has refused to step down.

The event in Syria began on 26/1/2011 as a result of a self-immortalization of Hassan Ali Akleh, when he poured gasoline on his body and set himself on fire.<sup>13</sup> This action was seen as a protest against the government of Syria. Sequel to this, on 28/1/2011, a street demonstration was held in Ar-Raqqa with a view to protesting the killing of two soldiers who were of Kurdish descent. On 3/2/2011, a Day of Rage was called for in Syria from 4-5 February, 2011. Their demand was a call for government reform, but this was met with stiff resistance by the security forces that dispersed the protesters and the arrest of others.

As the protests continue, the government used tanks and snipers to force people to go out of the streets. Therefore, water and electricity were shut off so as to make life unbearable for the citizenry. The effect of this was that more than 3000 protesters were killed: many others injured, while thousands of others were detained.

However, the government tried to make some concessions, example of which was that on 21/4/2011, the emergency law which had been in place since 1963, was repealed. Yet, crackdowns of the opponents had been on the increase. In addition to this, on 24/6/2011, a draft law was created. The law was to give more rooms for the political parties to operate not on religious, tribal, or ethnic beliefs and also without discriminating against

---

<sup>1</sup>. The news of his sudden death was seen as a relief to the NTC because other few remnants of his supporters and loyalists would not be able put up any strong resistance before they surrender.

<sup>2</sup>. Muhammad Gaddafi ruled for about 42 years, and it is not a secret in Libya that Saif al Islam Gaddafi had been pencilled down to succeed Muhammad Gaddafi. Most of the tribe men of Muhammad Gaddafi had also been favoured in the scheme of things. All these and many others were what the freedom fighters agitated against.

<sup>3</sup>. Many opposition leaders and their supporters fled the country for fear of persecution. One of them was Mohammed Magariaf, who went into hiding for fear of his life.

<sup>4</sup>. Muhammad Gaddafi and his sons had made large fortunes from the government's coffer. Others are his relatives, loyal members of his tribe who were posted to the central military and key positions in Libya.

<sup>5</sup>. Most youths who fought on the side of the freedom fighters were unemployed. In fact, record showed that about 20.74 per cent of Libyan citizens were unemployed. This therefore made it easy for the freedom fighters to enlist them in to the army.

<sup>6</sup>. This is however subject to debate because a lot of people outside Libya are of the opinion that their conditions are far better when compared with the living conditions of other African people in other parts of Africa. The social welfare scheme introduced by late Gaddafi made the living conditions of an average Libyan better than that of his counterparts in most African countries.

<sup>7</sup>. See Aljazeera News of 20/10/2011.

<sup>8</sup>. This is in view of the harsh conditions which the citizenry had been subjected to as a result of the rule of President Bashar al-Assad.

<sup>9</sup>. The Emergency Law of 1963 to 2011 was used to effectively suspend most of the constitutional protections of the citizens.

<sup>10</sup>. The 11 years rule of President Bashar al-Assad had witnessed high rate of corruption, and most of the beneficiaries of the corrupt system are members of his family, loyalists and supporters, etc.

<sup>11</sup>. An average Syrian lives below the poverty level. There is therefore a wide gap between the rich and the poor.

<sup>12</sup>. Example of this was the killing of over 100 civilians in the city of Hons on 25/5/2012.

<sup>13</sup>. This was exactly what happened in Tunisia in the case of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17/12/2010.

gender or race.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.5 Yemen Uprising

This uprising followed the initial ones in Tunisia, Egypt and the mass protests in other parts of the Middle East. Their demands were initially centred on the high rate of unemployment, harsh economic conditions,<sup>2</sup> corruption,<sup>3</sup> political reforms, formation of transitions with the sole aim of transferring power to a caretaker government which would in turn oversee a democratically election,<sup>4</sup> etc. Thereafter, the protesters asked President Ali Abdullahi Saleh to resign, which he was not prepared to. This was because of a draft amendment to the constitution which was under way. This was in spite of series of protests from the oppositions. The proposed amendment sought to allow President Ali Abdullahi Saleh to remain in office as president for life.

Major demonstrations took place in Sana'a, Yemeni capital, Aden, Taiz, etc. These protests were met with stiff responses when the government troops injured, killed, arrested and detained many civilians.

When the killings became too much, in April, 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council intervened by brokering a deal between the government and the oppositions. Part of the deal was that President Saleh should resign and in return, he would receive immunity from prosecution.<sup>5</sup> However, some hours before signing, President Ali Abdullahi Saleh backed away. Eventually, he gave up and he was therefore replaced with his Deputy President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. He came to power on 27/2/2012.

Apart from the problem which President Ali Abdullahi Saleh's government is faced with from the opposition, there are other problems with the al Qaeda in the Arabian-Peninsular, problem of secession in the Southern Yemen who are advocating for the old South Yemen to be reconstituted. There is also the Shia Houthis rebellion in the north that is advocating for a separate state. For the period the uprising went on, innocent civilians died on a daily basis.

## 2.6 Bahrain Uprising

This uprising is sequel to the revolutionary wave of protests in the Middle East and North Africa following the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia. It started on 14/2/2011 and it was initially aimed at achieving major political freedoms and equality for the majority of Shia in the country. However, it was later extended further by calling for the end of the regime of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifar. This call was as a result of the raid and attack launched on 17/2/2011 against protesters at the Pearl Round-about in Manama. In spite of this, the protesters camped at this place for many days. As a result of this incident, the King declared a martial law and a three month state of emergency.

On 14/3/2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreed to deploy Peninsula Shield Force Troops to Bahrain. Saudi Arabia deployed 1000 troops, while the United Arab Emirate deployed 500 police officers. The aim of this action was to secure the oil installations in the country from being bombarded and vandalized. The oppositions reacted to this, the result of which led to the death of many people in the incident. Medical doctors who volunteered to treat the casualties of the uprisings were not spared. Some of them were arrested, arraigned and sentenced to various terms of sentences.

## 2.7 Other Uprisings

The events that took place in the above named countries also sparked up revolts in other countries like Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, etc. Thus, there were reports of rioting and demonstrations in which the people demanded for greater reforms in the affected countries. However, most of the agitators for reforms were pacified with a promise by the governments that there would be more reforms in future. In Saudi Arabia, for example, part of the reform was that women can now contest in the 2015 municipal elections. With this, women can vote and be voted for in the 2015 election. In addition, the voting age of 21 years is now reduced to 18 years. This reform was however condemned by the oppositions and argued that the reform is cosmetic because the King controls everything. The reason of this is that the country operates an absolute monarchy. The King is both the Head of State and the Head of Government. Major decisions are made on the basis of consultation among senior princes of the royal family. In fact, the government is dominated by the vast royal family of Al Saud.

When the control of events in these countries would last is nobody's guess. But one thing which is certain is the influence which the events in other countries have created. This showed that with continuous

---

<sup>1</sup>. The oppositions also kicked against this, argued that Article 8 of the Syrian Constitution that granted the Barth party the role of leader of the state and society would also need to be repealed.

<sup>2</sup>. A substantial number of the populace live on two dollars or less per day, while another proportion of the civilian population suffer from hunger.

<sup>3</sup>. Under the Corruption Perceptions Index, the Transparency International (2010), Yemen was ranked as the 146th country.

<sup>4</sup>. This was however rejected by the government in early July, 2011.

<sup>5</sup>. This same offer was also made to him in October, 2011, by the UN, but this offer was also turned down.

struggle and perseverance, victory and success would soon come their way. When this would come is just a question of time.

### **3.0 General Causes of the Uprisings**

#### **3.1 Continuous Stay in Power by the Leaders**

A common phenomenon in these countries is the strong desire to stay in power for life or when they are under pressure to vacate the seat of power, they amend the constitution with a view to ensuring that their sons or loyalists succeed them. The least years in which these leaders have stayed in power are 20 years. By way of illustrations, former President Ben Ali ruled for 32 years, Late Muhammad Gaddafi of Libya ruled for 42 years before he was captured and killed on 20/10/11, President Saleh has ruled for 30 years and Assad has ruled for more than 29 years. In addition to this is that the rulers had always wished or had hidden agenda on who to succeed them, and preferably, their children. This is the case of Muhammad Gaddafi of Libya,<sup>1</sup> former President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt,<sup>2</sup> and late President Hafiz-Assad of Syria, etc. In fact, in the case of Syria, Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father, Hafiz Assad, after his death in 2000. The father ruled for 29 years. This explained why the demands of the protesters in the affected countries were centred on political reforms, democratization, freedom of speech, etc.

#### **3.2 Religious Factor (Islamic Awakening)**

As a matter of fact, religion, especially Islam can be said to be a major factor in the demonstrations and rioting that took place in the affected countries, namely Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, etc. In Tunisia, for example, the political party, An-Nahda that won the October, 2011, election has its strong supporters and members from among the Muslim fundamentalists. Again, the NTC, in Libya had said that it would uphold the teachings of Sharia. This was also the case in respect of Egypt.

Having said this, the uprisings and demonstrations were described to be a case of Islamic awakening in the region. This is against the background of the fact that the majority of the population in these countries are of the Islamic faith. This is in addition to the fact that Al-Qaeda networks had participated actively in some of these uprisings. This can be said to be the case in the on-going conflict in Syria. The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the region is also a strong connection. There is also the case of Sunni and Shia wrangling in country like Bahrain. Thus the clerics and Imams had used this opportunity in their sermons to preach against government policies. This is therefore the basis of the fear of the US and the West that argued that if these Muslim fundamentalists are in control of government in the affected countries, terrorism is likely to be in the increase, more so that before now, Islam has been likened with violence and terrorism. The actions of the Al Qaeda, Al-shabab, Boko haram, and other Islamic fundamentalists may have informed them to make this conclusion. Whether this conclusion is true or false is a question of individual's opinion, and depends on who owns such opinion.

#### **3.3 Bad Governance and corruption**

Bad governance is often generally characterized by inefficiency, corruption, and above all, abject general poverty. Thus, while the citizens wallowed in abject poverty, the leaders misused state resources on projects that had no significance value to the life of the citizens. This may be true of Tunisia and Egypt where the citizens of the countries immortalized themselves by setting their bodies on fire.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Libya, 20.74% of the citizens are unemployed, while one-third of the population lived below the national poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Because of their misrules, these leaders would always want their sons or their loyalists to succeed them. This was the case in respect of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, etc.

Turning to corruption in these countries, it is on record that corruption is very rampant among members of the ruling family and government personnel. According to Aladdin Elaasar, an Egyptian biographer and an American Professor, Mubarak and the family worth between \$50 to \$ 70 billion. Others are: Ahmed Ezz, the former NDP organization worth 18 billion Egyptian pounds. Ahmed al-Maghraby, the former Housing Minister worth 11 billion Egyptian pounds. Rashid Mohammed Rashid, the former Minister of Trade and Industry worth 12 billion Egyptian pounds. Then, Habib al-Adly, the former Interior Minister worth 8 billion Egyptian pounds.<sup>5</sup>

Coming to Libya, it was observed that large share of the business enterprises were controlled by

<sup>1</sup>. His son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi was expected to succeed late Muhammad Gaddafi of Libya.

<sup>2</sup>. His son, Gammal Hosni Mubarak was expected to succeed former President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

<sup>3</sup>. This may not be true of Libya. This is because evidences are on ground to indicate that an average Libyan is better off when compared with his counterparts in other parts of Africa. During the tenure of late Gaddafi, Libya had the highest GDP Per capita and life expectancy on the continent.

<sup>4</sup>. This information was revealed by some of the protesters that were interviewed when the Libyan uprising was on-going.

<sup>5</sup>. "Egypt's Mubarak Likely to Retain Vast Wealth". *ABC News*. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/egypt-mubarak-family-accumulated-wealth-days-military/story?id=12821073&page=2>. Retrieved 5 February 2011.



Muhammar Gadafi and his family. And that Gadafi amassed a vast personal fortune during his 42 years rule.

### 3.4 Human Rights Abuses

Power, as it is often said, corrupts absolutely. In this regard, history has shown that totalitarian regime does not want oppositions and criticisms even where they are made in good faith. It therefore follows that rulers in these countries, and who have overstayed in power does not want any form of oppositions. Suggestions made in good faith for reforms are often seen as open confrontations or a challenge to their governments.

This explained why these countries run a one party state. The results of these are that political opponents are clamped down or detained in prisons without trial, and at the same time subjected to human rights abuses or even killed without trial. These were effectively carried out with the existence of Emergency Law. This is the situation in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, etc. For example, in Libya, a substantial member of the NTC fled the country in order to save their lives. These people are former loyalists of Gadafi, but fell apart as a result of ideological differences.

In the case of Egypt, an Emergency law was enacted.<sup>1</sup> The law extended police powers, suspended the constitutional rights of the citizens, legalized censorship, and gave power to imprison suspects indefinitely, even without any reason. It also limited any non- governmental political activity including street demonstrations. With this law, many activists were imprisoned without trials. According to Human Rights Organization, between 5000 and 10000 people were put in long term detention without charge or trial.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.5 Foreign Interference

To illustrate this point, the old adage is that there are no permanent enemies, but, permanent interests. These permanent interests had been uppermost on the minds of the West and the US. Such permanent interests include the direct control of oil as in the case of Libya, sale of their manufactured weapons to combatants in war-zone areas,<sup>3</sup> strengthening of the power of Israel in the region, etc. A combination of these interests explained why North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) stationed its troops with a view to ensuring that Muhammar Gadafi was dethroned. This was done through the UN resolution, while Russia and China abstained from it.<sup>4</sup> This was in spite of the fact that the African Union (AU)<sup>5</sup> was opposed to NATO's intervention in the internal affairs of Libya. In the case of Egypt, they could not help former President Mubarak having found out that doing the contrary would amount to supporting a hopeless case. Therefore the people's choice counted and so Hosni Mubarak was forced to hand over power.

In another respect, the same form of interference was seen in the case of Syria. Therefore, apart from the indirect support given to the oppositions in the Syrian uprising, sanction was also used against President Assad, his family and members of his cabinet. This was done through the US and the European Union.<sup>6</sup> The Arab League had also in its meeting of November, 2011, suspended Syria from the League. What this showed is that more tough sanctions await President Bashar al-Assad in the years ahead.<sup>7</sup> Whether these tough decisions would have serious effects on the government of President Assad or not, only time shall tell.

In addition, it is also interesting to know that all efforts by the US and its allies to pass a tougher UN resolution against Syria failed. In all these attempts, Russia and China were, and always there to block such proposed resolutions.

Although, there had been cases of interference in these countries, the permanent interests of the western world had made them not to interfere in Bahrain, even though the same scenario exists in Bahrain<sup>8</sup> and Yemen. This is in spite of reported cases of mass killings of innocent civilians that occurred on a daily basis in these countries.

### 3.6 Weak Constitutional Framework

In most of the countries under review, their constitutions did not make specific provisions for change of governments through election processes. In other words, these countries had not witnessed any form of democracy at all<sup>9</sup> and even if there is, it is very weak. Instead, what is being used in these countries is a form of

<sup>1</sup>. See Law No. 162 of 1958.

<sup>2</sup>. Press release (29 June 2010). "Egypt: Keep Promise to Free Detainees by End of June: Joint Statement". Amnesty International. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/027/2010/en>. Retrieved on 4 February 2011.

<sup>3</sup>. The type of weapons used by the NTC fighters in Libya showed that they were bought from USA and the West.

<sup>4</sup>. President Bashar al-Assad has remained in power up to this moment because Russia and China are always there to block any UN resolution that will take punitive actions against his regime.

<sup>5</sup>. Even before the conflict in Libya ended, some oil companies had started lifting oil from Libya.

<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, Iran, Russia and China are giving the necessary support to the government of president Bashar al-Assad.

<sup>7</sup>. In fact, in June, 2012, the European Union (EU) imposed another sanction against the government of Syria.

<sup>8</sup>. The USA has a naval force base in Bahrain. Saudi Arabia also has some interests in Bahrain.

<sup>9</sup> In Libya, for example, parliamentary elections took place on 7/7/ 2012, the first that was witnessed in the country since the

succession through lineage. This explained why the rulers in these countries stay in power for decades. In Saudi Arabia, for example, governance is by hereditary from among members of the royal family. Little political reforms such as women rights to vote or be voted for was a later development.

#### 4.0 Aftermath of the Uprisings

In Tunisia where the uprising triggered up, Ben Ali lost his grip on the throne and went on exile to Saudi Arabia. In his absence, the case of corruption was filed against him.<sup>1</sup> In June, 2012, he was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in Tunisia. Another event which took place in the country was the political reform which eventually led to the election which took place on 23/10/2011.<sup>2</sup> The results showed that An-Nahda Political Party won the election.

In Egypt, only few reforms took place since the exit of Hosni Mubarak. One of the reforms was the trial of Hosni Mubarak, members of his family and his close associates of corruption charges and the illegal ordering of the killings of the protesters.<sup>3</sup> But the populace felt that there is much to be done, arguing that the expected changes were very slow. Therefore, they gave the government a time frame within which to carry out general elections in the country. In this regard, a parliamentary election took place in 2011. The results showed that the Muslim Brotherhood Party won with majority. These results were however cancelled by the military regime in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Sequel to this, a presidential election took place in May, 2012, and because there was no clear winner, a re-run was held between Mohammed Morsi and Ahmed Shafiq on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2012. The results showed that Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood won with 51.7% of the total votes. He was therefore sworn in as the president of Egypt. However, the events that led to the dethronement of former President Morsi and the emergence of President Abdel fatah el-sisi is now history.

In the case of Libya, following the capture and killing of Muhammar Gadafi, few changes were witnessed. The NTC<sup>5</sup> has therefore declared the liberation of Libya on 23/19/2011. A Prime Minister in the name of Abdurahim El Keib was appointed. The International Criminal Court (ICC) had indicted Saif al-Islam Gaddafi of offence of crimes against humanity committed during the uprising in Libya. It was said that he had asked the government troops to kill innocent civilians. In another respect, the UN report showed that both the government troops and NTC troops had committed war crimes offences.<sup>6</sup> In addition, a report of the Human Rights Watch observed that both sides to the war in Libya had committed human rights violations. These include killings of innocent civilians, war crime offences, etc.<sup>7</sup> What is however not clear is whether or not these violations would be used as a basis to prosecute the offenders at the ICC. This is against the background of the fact that NATO forces were involved in the human rights abuses and the western powers are likely to block any move to prosecute their troops at the ICC.

In July, 2012, parliamentary elections were conducted in Libya. In spite of many problems seen, it was reported that there was a large turn-out, an indication that the electorates were eager to exercise their civil and political rights by electing the leaders of their choices in the arts of governance. This is against the background of the fact that Libyans had never witnessed any election for the 42 years' regime of late Muhammar Gadafi. This election is therefore a welcome development.

Meanwhile, it needs to be pointed out that all eyes are now on Libya and members of the NTC so as to see how it would forge ahead and how fair and credible elections would be conducted for the people of Libya. This is to ensure that the innocent souls and bloods that were shed during the uprising would not be in vain. This hope had however been dashed because the relative peace, stability and development seen during the regime of late Gadafi had gradually disappeared.

Regarding Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and other countries in the Middle East and Africa where uprisings took place, the fierce resistance put up by the NTC fighters in Libya and their subsequent victory in overthrowing Muhammar Gadafi served as encouragement to them. They are now hoping that very soon their aims and aspirations would be achieved.

Another challenge is the vacuum of power created in the region in view of the present developments. With the uprisings in the region, the only powers to contend with now are Turkey, Syria, Iran and Lebanon. In the case of Syria, President Bashar al-Assad is still battling with the on-going uprising in the country. With much

---

last 42 years.

<sup>1</sup>. In absentia, the court in Tunisia sentenced him to life imprisonment for the offence of corruption and other related offences.

<sup>2</sup>. This is the first election to be held in Tunisia since the ousting of Ben Ali.

<sup>3</sup>. In 2012, the court in Egypt convicted Hosni Mubarak and some members of his cabinet to various terms of imprisonment.

<sup>4</sup> With the swearing in of Mohammed Morsi on 30/6/2012, it may be impracticable for him to rule with success without the parliament in place. This had however been overtaken by events in view of his dethronement, and the emergence of President Abdel fatah el-sisi.

<sup>5</sup>. The Council was formed in the Eastern city of Benghazi in February, 2011.

<sup>6</sup>. Investigations conducted showed that rapes of women had been committed while mass murder was also noticed.

<sup>7</sup>. See Press News of 19/1/2012.

push by the oppositions and their western sympathisers, Assad may eventually go just like Mubarak of Egypt and Ben Ali of Tunisia. And if the worst scenario happens, he may receive the same fate just like Muammar Gaddafi of Libya.

Therefore, if Syria falls under Bashar, the next target is Iran. In this regard, the following perspectives should be considered. Since the last uprising and rioting that preceded the second tenure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, the country had a relative peace and stability. But this was short lived, in view of certain events. There was a claim made by the USA that Iran was involved in an assassination attempt to kill Adel al-Jubir, the Saudi Ambassador to the USA and also an Adviser to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> In addition is the report released by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran was involved in the development of Nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup> Also, Israel had threatened to attack Iran on the pretext that Iran is developing nuclear programme. Its Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu sought for international supports, using the Iran Nuclear programme as a justification to invade Iran. He was quoted to have said that there are two options left for Iran: to face tough economic sanctions or military attack,<sup>3</sup> if Iran does not discontinue with its Nuclear programme.<sup>4</sup> From previous records, it seems that sanction against Iran would not yield any meaningful impact<sup>5</sup> and so the next option would be a military attack.

These issues may generate a direct war between Israel/USA against Iran. If this happens, this may weaken Iran militarily as a power broker in the region. This is exactly what the US wants so that Israel would be a leading power to be reckoned with in the region. If this happens, the already instability in the region may further be worsened as a result of this action.

However, the above view may have been overtaken by events. The end of tenure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the emergence of Hassan Rouhani as the President of Iran may have put on hold the speculations and views held above. Presently, there seems to be relative peace and harmonious relationship between Iran and the west. It is hopeful that this would be sustained in the years ahead.

#### 4.1 New Libya and Challenges Ahead

The death of Muammar Gaddafi on 20/10/2011 marked the final end of his 42 years rule in the country. Though, he is gone, Muammar Gaddafi would still remain relevant on the minds of many Libyans,<sup>6</sup> Africans<sup>7</sup> and the entire world in general.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be reiterated that many challenges await the government. Such include how to conduct peaceful elections<sup>9</sup> within a time frame that is agreeable to the citizenry. This is important so that they would not stay beyond their mandate as this is against the background of the fact that elections were not held throughout the tenure of Muammar Gaddafi. Another challenge is how to share power in terms of appointment into key posts without causing frictions amongst the people of Libya.

There is also the challenge of how to repair the infrastructure. The seven months uprising in Libya led to the collapse of the infrastructure. Many buildings (private and public) were damaged as a result of air bombardments. Though, this requires a lot of money, yet, something urgent has to be done so that the inhabitants will live a normal life.

There is also the problem of how to unite all the tribes in the country. Before and after the uprising, some of the tribes felt that they had been marginalized in the scheme of affairs of the country. This explained why some of the tribal leaders had mixed feelings on whether or not they should support the NTC. Specifically, the Gaddafi tribe did not support the uprising.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, some tribes that suffered as a result of the totalitarian regime of the government of Muammar Gaddafi have their grievances. In addition to this is the means of how to appease the family of those killed in the uprising.<sup>11</sup> The new government must therefore extend its hands of fellowship to other opposition groups so as to move the country forward.<sup>12</sup> All these are therefore

---

<sup>1</sup>. This claim was however denied by the government of Iran.

<sup>2</sup>. Iran denied this reiterating that the report is not only one sided but also, that it was manipulated by the USA to achieve its selfish interests.

<sup>3</sup>. See Voice of America, Hausa service news of 14/11/2011.

<sup>4</sup>. Israel wants itself to be the only country in possession of nuclear programme, thereby becoming a power- broker in the region.

<sup>5</sup>. This is against the background of the fact that previous sanctions in the past had not yielded any meaningful impacts.

<sup>6</sup>. A substantial number of his supporters and loyalists are still in Libya and beyond.

<sup>7</sup>. He was one of the few African leaders that championed the cause of a United Africa.

<sup>8</sup>. The West, specifically, the families of victims of Lockerbie incident of 1987 would never forgive him.

<sup>9</sup> The election of 7/ 7/2012 had further worsened things because of complaint of how seats were allocated to the various geographical groupings of the country.

<sup>10</sup>. This is obvious because of the fact that they benefited a lot from the regime and also because he is one of them.

<sup>11</sup>. This could be by way of monetary compensation or through trial of those who have committed various offences during the uprising.

<sup>12</sup>. This is against the background of the fact that there are many factions with different background and ideology.



challenges to the government and this need to be addressed quickly so as to maintain unity in the country.

There is also the need to reintegrate the NTC fighters into the national army. Most of the fighters on the side of the NTC were volunteers who had no means of livelihood. Therefore, there is need to reintegrate them.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the influx of weapons in circulation in the hands of these youths must be quickly recovered so that they are not used illegally.

In another respect, the government has to find out those involved in the killing of Muhammad Gaddafi so that such ugly incident does not happen again and also for purpose of prosecuting the offenders. This, if done would comport members of his family and supporters who are not only angry over his death but also the way he was buried in a discreet manner.

The new government of Libya must also face the fact that they have to contend with the USA and the NATO members who gave the troops the technical supports for the air raids that finally led to the capturing and killing of Muhammad Gaddafi. These foreign sponsors had not given their supports for nothing. They had their real motive and that is the control of oil in Libya<sup>2</sup> and also the annexation of Libya. Therefore, though Libya has been liberated, the NATO troops are not likely to leave the country very soon. The experiences of the presence of foreign troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are enough to prove this assertion. Therefore, unless the new government in Libya handles this issue with caution, the Libyans may be forced to say that they prefer the old regime of Muhammad Gaddafi to the present regime. But whether one is sounding as alarmist or not, only future events in Libya shall tell.

### **5.0 Prosecution of Offences Committed in the Uprisings**

There is no doubt that various offences were committed by the demonstrators and government troops. Such offences include mass murder, mass rape of women, crimes against humanity, etc. In this respect, the ICC indicted some individuals like Saif al-Islam Gaddafi and the rest in Libya.<sup>3</sup> The UN also identified that the two sides to the uprisings committed war crime offences, citing existence of grave sites where many dead bodies were found.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, the UN, ICC and other stakeholders should ensure that this is extended to other countries where similar offences have been committed so that all the culprits are prosecuted.

In addition, the circumstance that led to the death of Muhammad Gaddafi needs to be investigated with a view to prosecuting those who killed him. The news of his sudden death after being captured is very disturbing.<sup>5</sup> In International law, upon captured, he is regarded as a Prisoner of War and so should be treated as such. Anything short of this should be treated as a violation of the rules of law of warfare. In this respect, the UN and the ICC should make a detail inquiry into the cause of death of Muhammad Gaddafi with a view to prosecuting the offenders.

On a broader view, the UN and ICC in collaborations with the governments of the affected countries should find how the offenders can be punished. In this regard, the following suggestions are offered:

- a. To set up a commission of inquiry that will look into the complaints of those who feel that their rights have been violated.<sup>6</sup>
- b. Prosecuting the offenders of minor offences through the national courts of each country.<sup>7</sup>
- c. Major offences could be referred to the ICC for thorough investigation after which those who have a case to answer are tried by the court.<sup>8</sup>

### **6.0 Lessons Learnt from the Uprisings**

Africa is underdeveloped and this can be traced to the past, i.e. colonialism, slavery, and slave trade, inter and intra-tribal wars, coups and counter coups, among others.<sup>9</sup> With the end of the cold war, Africa witnessed more armed conflicts than any other continent around the world. These include the Nigerian civil war (1967- 1970), Angolan civil war (1975-1991), Liberian civil war (1989-86, 1999-2003), Congolese civil war (1960-65, 1996-

---

<sup>1</sup>. Failure of this would make them to become nuisance in the society and this may affect the desired peace and tranquillity which the country needs at this moment.

<sup>2</sup>. This is against the background of the fact that the oil in Libya is one of the best throughout the world.

<sup>3</sup>. Before now, he was in the hands of Niger government and the government has been very sceptical on whether or not to release him to the government of Libya.

<sup>4</sup>. The NATO troops are also not left out. On many occasions, they have raided and bombarded civilians and residential areas.

<sup>5</sup>. The feeling among some people is that he was killed deliberately because if he had been spared, the remnants of his loyalists and supporters still in hiding would want to put up a fierce resistance.

<sup>6</sup>. This was done in the past by some countries, example, of which are South Africa and Nigeria among others.

<sup>7</sup>. This should be done with fairness so that the interests of all are taken into consideration.

<sup>8</sup>. In the case of Libya, the ICC had already indicted some people of the offence of crimes against humanity and other related offences.

<sup>9</sup>. These are also peculiar to most countries in the Middle East.

1997, 1998-2003), Eritrean war of Independence (1961-1991), Sudanese civil war<sup>1</sup>, Somali civil war<sup>2</sup> etc.

A common phenomenon to both the Middle East and African countries are the sit tight rulers. These rulers have stayed in the corridor of power for 10 years and above.<sup>3</sup> Most of these countries are therefore run as a one party state. In most cases, elections were not conducted or where they were conducted, they were rigged in favour of the incumbent. In another respect, in the case of Saudi Arabia, succession to the throne is within and amongst the royal family.

Against this background, the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Morocco, Jordan, etc. are indications of the fact that there are many lessons for us to learn. Foremost, the Libyan experience showed that dictators have life span. Who would have thought that the 42 years rule of Muammar Gaddafi would crumble the way it did? It also showed that the people's choice is always supreme and that it is from this that the leaders derive the source of their authority to rule and govern the populace. It therefore follows from the above that if the citizens are dissatisfied with the way and manner they are being governed, they can always resist and topple the government. This is exactly what had happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, etc.

In addition, it is a victory for democracy and freedom fighters throughout the world. At least, in Tunisia, election had been held in the country, the first ever to be held since the end of the regime of Ben Ali. One can therefore say that more elections would be conducted in the country in the years ahead. In the case of Libya and Egypt, elections had since been conducted.

It is also a victory for freedom fighters because it is an indication that the people through their struggles have liberated themselves from the oppressive regimes of their tyrant rulers. This is said to be the case in respect of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. The same thing can be said of the regime of Hosni Mubarak. While Muammar Gaddafi ruled for 42 years, Hosni Mubarak ruled for 30 years. Who would have thought that the two regimes would come to an end at the time they did?

It equally follows that dictators within the region and beyond should retrace their steps and make amends with the citizenry by embarking on people oriented programme. This is therefore a food for thought for these rulers in the region.

This also serves as a sign of hope to all the oppressed throughout the world. Apart from the countries where uprisings have taken place, there are other countries, especially in Africa and indeed the third world countries where the leaders have subjected the citizenry to hardships. The citizens should therefore be hopeful and intensify their efforts in bringing to an end such oppressive regimes.

There is also the entrenchment of democracy in the affected countries under review. Immediately after the demise of Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, parliamentary elections took place in 2011. Sequel to this, in May and June, 2012, a presidential election took place in the country. The results showed that Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood won. In Libya, parliamentary elections took place on 7/7/2012, a prelude to presidential election that would be conducted later in the year.

In another respect, while the uprisings have reshaped the role of NATO, they have also serve as a wake-up call on the United Nations, African Union and the Arab League to brace up for the challenges ahead by doing their expected functions within the ambit of the Charters that established them. In respect of the uprising in Libya, the UN failed to take a quick response and decisive action, hence, NATO occupied Libya under the pretext of saving the lives of the civilians. Ironically, many innocent civilians were killed as a result of the air raids and bombardments of Libya. Of course, this was not the first time of NATO's action.<sup>4</sup> With or without UN authorisation, NATO had in the past invaded a foreign state under the pretext of promoting peace in the country being occupied. This is therefore a challenge to the UN to act when it is supposed to act because failure to act may also be deemed to mean a failure on its part. It is also this failure that equally affects the AU and the Arab League. Perhaps, having realised its previous mistakes, the Arab League suspended Syria from the League on account of the on-going uprising in the country. Whether this suspension would have any meaningful impact, only future events shall tell.

## 7.0 Conclusion

In summary, this paper commenced with an introduction, pointing out that changes and revolution are as old as

<sup>1</sup>. Sudan witnessed a long period of civil war: the effect of this was the birth of Southern Sudan as an independent state.

<sup>2</sup>. Because of the long period of civil war that was executed in Somali, the country was declared as a failed state.

<sup>3</sup>. Late Gaddafi of Libya (42 years), Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen (about 11 years), Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (more than 24 years), President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea (more than 32 years), Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (30 years), Assad of Syria (more than 11 years) while his father, late Hafez Assad spent 29 years on the throne, etc. There is also the case of Abdullah Wad of Senegal. His second tenure in office ended in 2012, after a failed attempt to come back again. Currently, the President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi is planning for a third tenure, even though this is unconstitutional. This, if not handled with caution, may drag the country into a civil war.

<sup>4</sup>. NATO invaded The Former Yugoslavia in 1999. It also bombarded Afghanistan. Before now, it bombarded Iraq. All these were done without the UN authorization.

human history that the on-going uprisings and reform changes in the countries mentioned above are normal occurrence of life. Thereafter, the paper gave a general overview of the uprisings in these countries and then proceeded by discussing some of the causes and consequences of these uprisings. The offences committed during the uprisings were identified with a view to offering suggestions on how the offenders would be prosecuted in future.

The lessons which are to be learnt from these uprisings were also discussed. The intention here is that the leaders in these countries and others beyond should retrace their steps by embarking on people oriented programmes so that people's lives are better improved. And that the wishes of the people should be at the centre of governance of the leaders; the people should always have the final say on how they are to be governed, otherwise they have the power to revolt against a ruler that misgoverned them. This is therefore a food for thought for all. At the same time, the on-going conflicts in Syria must be stopped, and to do this effectively, both the Arab League as a regional organization and the UN must collaborate with each other for effective maintenance of peace and stability in Syria, and beyond.