

The Foreign Ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden met in Helsinki on 5 April 2011 for their biannual meeting to discuss matters of common interest in the area of foreign affairs and security policy including a Nordic declaration on solidarity.

The Nordic declaration on solidarity

The Ministers emphasized a strong community of values between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Efforts to promote democracy, international law including human rights, gender equality and sustainable development are integral parts of the foreign policy of the Nordic countries. On the basis of common interest and geographical proximity it is natural for the Nordic countries to cooperate in meeting the challenges in the area of foreign and security policy in a spirit of solidarity. In this context Ministers discussed potential risks inter alia natural and man-made disasters, cyber and terrorist attacks. Should a Nordic country be affected, the others will, upon request from that country, assist with relevant means. The intensified Nordic cooperation will be undertaken fully in line with each country's security and defense policy and complement existing European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation.

The Ministers pointed out that the Nordic declaration on solidarity will be followed up through practical measures, such as cooperation in the field of cyber security, as a first step.

Declaration on foreign policy issues

People of the region across North Africa and the Middle East are courageously standing up to build a future based on democracy, pluralism, the rule of law, human rights and social justice. The Ministers welcomed the democratic reforms underway in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries of the region and reaffirmed the commitment by the Nordic countries to support them. They strongly condemned the violence with which peaceful calls for democracy have been confronted in a number of countries. It is the responsibility of the state authorities to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their people in accordance with their international obligations, including the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly.

Countries in the region need to undertake or accelerate political and socio-economic reforms. The ministers encouraged regional organizations, in particular the Arab League and the African Union, to step up their efforts to encourage and support reforms in the region. The Ministers welcomed efforts by the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, individual nations and other actors to provide support to the region. They stressed the importance of a coordinated and comprehensive approach. The peoples of North Africa and the Middle East themselves are leading the reform processes. The role of the international community is to support them in the realization of their aspirations, including by supporting democratic institutions, free and independent media and civil society organizations.

In Libya Colonel Khadafi has lost all legitimacy and he must relinquish power immediately. The Ministers welcomed the unity and determination that the international community has expressed in addressing the situation in Libya and emphasized the importance of a strong engagement by the regional organizations, in particular the Arab League and the African Union. They expressed strong support for the full and immediate implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1970 and 1973 and in particular stressed the urgent need to improve the situation for the civilian population in Libya. The Ministers underlined the need for a true and verified ceasefire in conformity with the resolutions. Efforts to find a political solution to the crisis should be enhanced. This must be done through an open and broadly based national dialogue.

The Ministers condemned in the strongest terms Friday's attack on the UN compound in Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, in which a Norwegian and a Swedish UN representative were among those who were killed.

The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to support a stable and democratic development in Afghanistan. They welcomed the start of the transition process as announced by President Karzai on March 22 and declared their readiness to support it comprehensively, including through long-term development assistance in accordance with Afghan priorities. The Nordic countries are committed to help the Afghan people build a lasting peace and to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process. In this context, the Ministers stressed the importance of political, economic and social rights, including

women's rights. Furthermore, as the transition proceeds, there is an increasing need for the Afghan government to strengthen good governance and the rule of law, including to take firm measures against corruption.

The Ministers also discussed the cooperation in the Arctic Council and the Ministerial meeting in Nuuk on 12 May 2011, when Denmark will pass on the chairmanship of the Council to Sweden. The Ministers looked forward to a successful meeting that would represent a milestone in the aims of strengthening the Arctic Council and solving the observer question.