

Libya's money for Libyans

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Libya is undergoing great turmoil at the hands of a brutal regime simply because the Libyan people want to experience what others take for granted: freedom and democracy. Though parts of Libya are secured from Moammar Kadafi's retaliation, these areas remain in desperate need of aid. The world community is holding billions of dollars in Libyan assets in their respective banks. Now is the time to unfreeze those assets, grant the Libyan people some of their own money and alleviate the suffering.

As I write this, Kadafi is systematically trying to destroy all those who dare oppose him. His brigades, by most estimates, have massacred more than 10,000 of their own people, devastated cities, towns and villages such as Misurata and Zawiya and displaced more than 50,000 people to camps in Tunisia and eastern Libya.

The world knows there is no future for democracy in Libya while Kadafi remains in power. The Libyan opposition's Transitional National Council, recognized by more than a dozen European nations, is generally considered the only legitimate ruling interim authority in Libya until stability can be restored and full, free elections can be held.

Despite some assistance from many countries, the council is finding it increasingly difficult to provide essential services as the conflict drags on. The council must provide for residents and displaced people in the eastern half of the country, where it is in authority, and it must coordinate humanitarian aid and medical supplies for besieged areas, such as Misurata, and in refugee camps along Libya's borders.

The council was unable to pay the May salaries for employees in the public sector. We have purchased fuel on credit. Medical supplies are at a critically low level. We have no drugs available for cancer, heart and kidney patients or for those suffering from psychological ailments. Anesthesia supplies are running low as the conflict creates major casualties in need of immediate treatment and care.

Even with regard to food, the subsidized staples of our diet are running out, and if we are forced to pay full market prices for these goods, the majority of our people will have to go without even the most basic items.

At the start of the conflict, sanctions against Kadafi were quite rightly implemented and most Libyan government bank accounts abroad were frozen. These billions of dollars in assets, which belong to the Libyan public, were misappropriated by Kadafi and his extended family. But now this frozen money should be released in a controlled and accountable manner to the council and the Libyan people. U.N. Resolution 1970, which established the latest sanctions, allows frozen funds to be released for humanitarian aid.

It is incredible that in their time of great need, Libyans are unable to access these resources to bring relief to innocent civilians victimized by a dictator whom they have collectively decided to oust. The international community's alternative to unfreezing Libyan funds, known as the temporary financial mechanism, so far appears to be purely an academic exercise. Forwarding funds to the Libyan people has yet to take place. We cannot wait for a long, drawn-out bureaucratic process.

Not so long ago, the Libyan people were subjected to U.N. sanctions as a result of Kadafi's support for terrorism around the globe. Even without those sanctions, the 1980s and early 1990s would have been a period of great oppression coupled with terrible economic mismanagement. The sanctions devalued Libya's currency by two-thirds and hindered oil production, which is the country's main source of income.

The Libyan people, even though they were the main victims of the sanctions, understood the reasoning behind the international community's attitude toward Kadafi. Today we are indeed grateful for NATO's actions and for the international support in protecting civilians. However, Libyans find it extremely difficult to understand why they must again pay so heavily for Kadafi's actions.

I appeal to the international community to urgently consider Libya's critical situation. Do not make us double victims: to Kadafi's fire on one side and to the sanctions designed to implode the regime on the other.

To have been double victims once was difficult enough. To experience such needless suffering again is simply not an option.

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<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-xpm-2011-jun-24-la-oe-alisawi-libyaassets-20110624-story.html>