People of Tunisia:

I am speaking to you today, everyone, both inside and outside Tunisia. I speak to you in the language of Tunisians. I am speaking to you now because the situation demands deep change. Yes, deep and comprehensive change.

I have understood you. Yes, I have understood you. I have understood everyone: the unemployed, the needy, the politician, and those demanding more freedoms. I have understood you. I have understood you all. However, the events currently taking place in our country are not part of us. Vandalism is not part of the customs of Tunisians—civilized Tunisians, tolerant Tunisians.

Violence is not part of us, nor is it part of our conduct. This trend must stop, with the concerted efforts of everyone: political parties, national organizations, civil society, intellectuals and citizens. Hand in hand, for the sake of our country. Hand in hand for the sake of all our children’s security.

The change I am announcing now is in response to your demands, to which we have reacted. We have felt deep pain at what has occurred.

My sadness and pain are great, for I have spent more than fifty years of my life in the service of Tunisia, in different positions: from the National Army to various other responsibilities, and twenty-three years as head of state. Every day of my life has been and continues to be in the service of the country. I have offered sacrifices, which I do not like to recount as you all know them, and I have never accepted, and do not accept still, the shedding of a single drop of Tunisian blood.

We felt pain for the victims who fell and the persons who suffered damage, and I refuse to see more fall as a result of the continuation of violence and looting.
Our children today have stayed home and did not go to school. This is a shame and a disgrace, because we have become fearful for them from the violence perpetrated by gangs who have robbed and looted and assaulted people. This is a crime, not protest. This is abhorrent. The citizens, all citizens, must stand up to them. We have issued instructions, and we rely on everyone’s cooperation, to distinguish between these gangs and groups of deviants who are taking advantage of the circumstances, and peaceful, legitimate protests, to which we do not object.

My sadness is very great and very deep. Very profound. Enough with violence! Enough with violence!

I have also issued instructions to the interior minister, and I have repeated, and today I confirm: do not use live ammunition. Live ammunition is not acceptable. It is not justified, unless, God forbid, someone tries to disarm you or attacks you with a firearm, or the like, and forces you to defend yourself.

I ask that the independent commission—I repeat, the independent commission, which will investigate the incidents and the abuses and the regrettable deaths—to delineate the responsibilities of all sides, without exception, in all fairness, integrity and objectivity.

We expect every Tunisian, those who support us and those who do not, to support the efforts to restore calm and to abandon violence, vandalism, and depravation. Reform requires calm. The incidents that we have witnessed were at the outset protests against social conditions, which we had made great efforts to fix, but we still require greater efforts to redress shortcomings. We all have to give ourselves the chance and the time required for all our important measures to materialize.

In addition, I have tasked the government—I called the prime minister—to reduce the prices of basic commodities and foodstuffs—sugar, milk, bread, etc.

As for political demands. I told you that I have understood you. Yes, I told you that I have understood you. And I have decided on full freedom for the media, in all its forms, and not shutting down Internet sites, and rejecting any form of censorship on them, while ensuring the respect of our morals and the principles of the journalistic profession.

As for the commission that I announced two days ago to look into corruption, bribery, and the mistakes of officials, this commission will be independent—yes, independent—and we will ensure its fairness and integrity.
The field is open, from this day onward, for freedom of political expression, including peaceful demonstrations—organized and orderly peaceful demonstrations, civilized demonstrations. That is fine. If a party or an organization wishes to organize a peaceful demonstration, they are welcome. But they should notify [us] of it, set its time and place, and organize it, and cooperate with the responsible parties to preserve its peaceful character.

I would like to assure you that many things did not happen the way I would have liked them to. Especially in the areas of democracy and freedoms. Sometimes, some misled me, by hiding the truth from me, and they will be held accountable. Yes, they will be held accountable.

Therefore, I reiterate to you, in all clarity, that I will work to promote democracy and to put pluralism into effect. Yes, to promote democracy and to put pluralism into effect.

And I will work to preserve and respect the country’s constitution. And I’d like to reiterate here, in contrast to what some have claimed, that I have pledged, on November 7, that there would be no presidency for life. No presidency for life. Therefore, I renew thanks to all who have urged me to renominate myself in 2014, but I refuse to violate the age condition for candidacy for the presidency of the republic.

We want to reach the year 2014 in a framework of genuine civil consensus, and an atmosphere of national dialogue, with the participation of all national parties in assuming responsibilities.

Tunisia is the country of all of us. The country of all Tunisians. We love Tunisia and all of her people love her. We must protect her.

Let the will of her people remain in its hands and in the faithful hands that it will choose to continue the journey that began since independence and that we have continued since 1987.

To that end, we will set up a national commission headed by an independent national personality, with credibility among all the social and political parties, in order to review the electoral code, the press code, and the law of associations, etc. The commission will suggest the necessary provisional ideas until the 2014 elections, including the possibility of separating legislative elections and presidential elections.

Tunisia belongs to us all. Let us all preserve her. Her future is in our hands. Let us all safeguard it. Each one of us is responsible, from their position, for restoring her security, her stability, and for healing her wounds, and for ushering her into a new era that would better enable her to have a brighter future.
Long live Tunisia. Long live her people. Long live the republic. May peace and God’s grace be upon you.