

Preparations for upcoming Syria peace conference ‘on track,’ says UN chief

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UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon briefs the press.

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Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that preparations for the long-awaited international conference aimed at achieving a political solution to the crisis in Syria are moving ahead, and stressed that negotiations are the only way to end the ongoing bloodshed.

“We expect the Syrian Government and opposition to focus hard in the coming days on making their delegations as strong and representative as possible,” Mr. Ban told a news conference at UN Headquarters in New York.

“Negotiations will be difficult, but without them, there is only bloodshed and despair on the horizon. I count on those with influence to encourage the Syrian parties to come to the Conference with the serious intention to end the war and agree on a peaceful transition.”

More than 30 nations have been invited to attend the conference, which be held in Switzerland in two parts, with the opening session in Montreux on 22 January 2014, and then moving on 24 January to the UN office in Geneva. It will be the first time the

Syrian Government and the opposition meet at a negotiating table since the conflict started in March 2011.

The goal of the so-called “Geneva II” conference is to achieve a political solution to the conflict through a comprehensive agreement between the Government and the opposition for the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué, adopted after the first international meeting on the issue on 30 June 2012, which called for the creation of a transitional government that would lead to holding elections.

The Joint Special Representative of the UN and the League of Arab States for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, met last Friday in Geneva with counterparts from the United States and Russia, as well as with a wider group of countries to discuss the preparations for the upcoming conference.

Mr. Ban said that after the meetings held Friday, “we are on track to convene the conference,” adding that the list of invitees is near complete.

The conference will include the UN, the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the US), the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and 26 other countries. Mr. Brahimi said after Friday’s meeting that the participation of Iran has not yet been agreed.

The Secretary-General said today that he hoped the question of Iran’s participation is resolved soon. “As I have said before, Iran needs to contribute to peace in Syria along with others in the region.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Ban noted, the UN and its partners are doing “everything we can” to help ease the suffering. Over 100,000 people have been killed and 8 million driven from their homes, 2 million of them seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, since the conflict first erupted.

“I call on the sides to free detainees, end sieges and allow greater humanitarian access. I appeal to them to reduce the horrific violence. I utterly condemn the recent use of so-called ‘barrel bombs,’ which has added yet another appalling dimension to the fighting,” he added.

“All involved in this conflict should signal their intention to open the way for a new future.”

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Joint UN-Arab League envoy says over 30 nations invited to peace conference on Syria

20 December 2013

The Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi today announced that more than 30 nations have been invited to attend the long-sought Syria peace conference to be held in Geneva next month.