

# UN-Arab League envoy watching for Syrian reactions to opposition offer on talks

[UN news.un.org/en/story/2013/01/430982](http://news.un.org/en/story/2013/01/430982)

January 30, 2013



30 January 2013

Reaffirming the importance of negotiation to stop the carnage in Syria, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States reacted cautiously today to reports that an opposition leader was ready to hold talks with the Syrian Government.

“It is worthy of note. Let’s see how the Government is going to respond,” Lakhdar Brahimi said in an interview with the UN News Centre, in regard to reports that the head of the major opposition coalition, Moaz Al Khatib, said that he was willing to talk to representatives of the Government outside of Syria and under certain conditions.

“And let’s see how the colleagues of Moaz Al Khatib are going to react,” Mr. Brahimi added, noting that the opposition leader said that among the most important conditions for the talks was the freeing of 160,000 political prisoners.

More than 60,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in early 2011. Recent months have witnessed an escalation in the conflict, which has also left more than 4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Despite the failure of international efforts to bring about negotiations to stop the fighting, and whatever the result of Mr. Al Khatib's comments, Mr. Brahimi reaffirmed today the importance of talks toward a political agreement.

“Our efforts at starting negotiation have not been very successful. But the military campaigns have not been successful either in finishing the conflict. In fact, the conflict is expanding and damages inflicted on the people and the country are growing,” he said.

“Nobody has said it’s going to be easy,” he added. “But perhaps negotiating is better than killing each other.”

Yesterday, Mr. Brahimi briefed the Security Council on the latest developments and told reporters afterwards that the 15-member body must act now because Syria was being destroyed “bit by bit,” with that destruction posing a threat to the entire region.

Today, he called for the Council to act in a unified manner, using the Geneva communiqué, which was issued after a meeting of the so-called Action Group for Syria last June and which lays out key steps in a process to end the violence in Syria.

Amongst other items, the communiqué called for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.

Mr. Brahimi said that the communiqué was still a good basis for a political solution, but it had been interpreted differently by the people who have signed it and by the five permanent members of the Security Council – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States. What is needed, he stressed, is for the P5 to come to “a common understanding of what Geneva meant.”

The communiqué could then be transformed into an international agreement, through, for example, a resolution of the Council to bring about the necessary negotiations.

“I think they can make the Geneva agreement operational,” he said, referring to Council members. “I think they could do that if they speak in one voice.”

In his remarks today, Mr. Brahimi said he does not plan on returning to Syria unless there are developments there that require his presence, commenting that otherwise he had a good team on the ground. “If I go to Syria it’s because there is something that I need to do,” he said.

Mr. Brahimi’s remarks came as a humanitarian pledging conference for Syria chaired by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon concluded in Kuwait today, raising over \$1.5 billion to assist civilians affected by the ongoing conflict over the next six months, including those taking refuge beyond Syria’s borders.

Brahimi