

Syrian Opposition Council Forms in Istanbul

By Sebnem Arsu

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ISTANBUL — Syrian opposition leaders announced on Thursday the formation of a national council to support the revolution against President Bashar al-Assad's government and communicate with other nations in a unified voice.

The 140-member council was elected after a series of meetings that began in August in response to a crackdown by Syrian troops on civilian protesters, organizers said.

Basma Qadmani, a spokeswoman for the group, said that 60 percent of the council consisted of opposition members inside Syria, with the rest allocated to members of the diaspora.

“Our group has worked to secure as many groups as possible from inside and outside Syria,” Ms. Qadmani said. “The legitimacy of this council, however, derives primarily from approval from inside Syria, so we did everything to our power to consult all opposition groups there.”

Many council members say there has not been an efficient channel for international support, which has become more important as Iran has emerged as a backer of the Syrian government.

“We want the Syrian regime to be isolated and all diplomatic contacts to be halted,” said Abdulbaset Sida, a member of the council.

The United Nations estimates that more than 2,600 people have been killed in Syria since the uprising began in March. President Assad has denied the excessive use of force by his security officials and so far dismisses international calls to quit.

The national council said it would seek to form a multiethnic and pluralist Syria, run without any political emphasis on religion.

The council also aims to start a satellite television broadcast, form a foreign office and set up a law office to work on future court procedures involving crimes it alleges have been committed by the Assad government.