

Syria still 'of utmost concern,' UN says after sending half of observer force home
By: UN News Centre
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The United Nations peacekeeping chief announced today that half of the 300 UN observers in Syria have left the country, while adding that the crisis there remains "of utmost concern" and the world body will continue to promote a political solution.

"We will try to work towards contributing to a political solution which would help alleviate all the suffering," the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, told a press conference in Damascus.

"We have to hope that the whole process gains traction, that the vicious circle of violence can cease, and that some political solution, and first and foremost some political dialogue, can get started," he added.

With half of the military observers serving with the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) having been sent back home, Mr. Ladsous said that the Mission is operating on a reduced basis in a reduced number of team sites in the provinces and "does what it can."

"We, of course, have to take into account the security situation, which in many places is extremely delicate," he stated.

The Under-Secretary-General said he will discuss the situation – "which remains of utmost concern to the United Nations, to the Secretary-General and to the Security Council" – in his meetings with various actors in the country.

Last week, the Council extended UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days. Established in April, the Mission had recently suspended its regular patrols due to the escalating violence in the country, where over 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed and tens of thousands displaced since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began some 16 months ago.

Joining Mr. Ladsous today was the UN Military Adviser, Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye, who has arrived in Syria to assume leadership of UNSMIS, following the departure of Major-General Robert Mood.

UNSMIS is tasked with monitoring the cessation of violence in Syria, as well as monitoring and supporting the full implementation of the six-point peace plan put forward by the Joint Special Envoy for the UN and the League of Arab States for the Syrian Crisis, Kofi Annan.

That plan calls for an end to violence, access for humanitarian agencies to provide relief to those in need, the release of detainees, the start of inclusive political dialogue, and unrestricted access to the country for the international media.