

## **UN Security Council backs Annan peace plan**

**By Aljazeera**

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The United Nations Security Council has adopted a statement backing joint UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan's plan for sending the violence in Syria, as a government crackdown on opposition strongholds has continued.

Mark Lyall Grant, the UK's ambassador to the UN and the current president of the council, read out the statement during a UNSC session on Wednesday.

The statement expressed the council's "full support" for the Annan's efforts, and called upon both the government and the opposition "to work in good faith with the envoy towards a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis" and to fully implement his six-point proposal.

The statement threatened "further steps" if the government failed to comply with the proposal.

The plan calls for a ceasefire to be established, as well as for both sides to engage in political dialogue and to allow humanitarian aid agencies access to areas where citizens have been caught up in an increasingly militarised conflict.

It also calls for those detained during a government crackdown on protests to be released, and for restrictions on the freedom of journalists to be removed.

The UNSC called on the Syrian government to commit to working with "an inclusive Syrian-led political process to address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people".

The statement has the backing of all 15 members of the council, including China and Russia, who have twice vetoed earlier UNSC resolutions on the crisis, citing concerns that the UN was taking sides in the crisis.

The United Nations says over 8,000 civilians have been killed in a crackdown on an opposition movement against President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Unlike resolutions, which are legally binding and require nine votes in favour and no vetoes from the council's five permanent members in order to pass, statements are generally non-binding but require unanimous support from the council.

### **Full support**

In a bid to gain support from Russia and China, France softened the text of the statement, removing a section that would have required a review of progress on Annan's proposal in seven days. The government would be threatened with "further measures" if sufficient progress was not deemed to have been made.

The revised draft of the statement, however, asks Annan only to update the council regularly on the progress of his mission.

"In the light of these reports, the Security Council will consider further steps as appropriate," the statement said.

The latest statement from the UNSC is a "presidential statement", which means that it becomes a part of the council's permanent record, unlike normal press statements.

Speaking in Berlin, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, said that the text of the statement "reflects the reality in Syria and supports Annan's aims. We support it fully".

"The document does not contain any ultimatums, threats or assertions about who is guilty," he said,

'Future transition'

Earlier, Lavrov told local radio station Kommersant-FM that Russia believed that "the Syrian leadership reacted wrongly to the first appearance of peaceful protests and ... is making very many mistakes".

"This, unfortunately, has in many ways led the conflict to reach such a severe stage."

Lavrov also spoke of a "future transition" period for Syria but continued to reject calls from most Western and Arab states for Assad to resign, saying this was "unrealistic".

One of the major sticking points over a resolution on the crisis has been on the issue of how a ceasefire is implemented. While previous resolutions have called for the government's forces to stop firing first, Russia and China have insisted that both the government and opposition must lay down arms simultaneously.

The current statement calls on the Syrian government to "immediately cease troop movements towards, and end the use of heavy weapons in, population centres, and begin pullback of military concentrations in and around population centres".

"Similar commitments would be sought by the Envoy from the opposition and all relevant elements to stop the fighting and work with him to bring about a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties with an effective United Nations supervision mechanism," it said.

Draft resolution

The latest statement is separate from a US-drafted resolution calling on Syria to allow access to humanitarian aid workers in the country.

In August last year, the council passed a presidential statement on Syria, although council members reached a rare unanimous agreement on informal remarks to the press on March 1 to rebuke Damascus for not allowing UN humanitarian aid chief Valerie Amos into the country.

Amos was allowed to visit Damascus shortly after those remarks were passed.

Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, said on Tuesday that the crisis in Syria was one of the most pressing issues facing the world.

"We have no time to waste, no time to lose. Just one minute, one hour delay will mean more and more people dead," Ban told reporters in the Indonesian city of Bogor, his first stop on an Asian tour.

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