

**U.N. General Assembly passes resolution endorsing plan for al-Assad to step down**  
**By The CNN Newswire**  
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The United Nations General Assembly has passed a nonbinding resolution endorsing the Arab League plan for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to step down.

The vote was 137 in favor and 12 against, with 17 abstentions.

The symbolic resolution that condemns al-Assad's violent crackdown in Syria was introduced into the assembly after China and Russia blocked the Security Council from approving enforceable measures aimed at curbing the violence.

The vote followed news that al-Assad has moved up a vote on a constitutional referendum touted by his government as an important reform initiative. Critics have derided the move as window dressing.

"Today, the UN General Assembly sent a clear message to the people of Syria: the world is with you," U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice said in a statement. "An overwhelming majority of UN member states have backed the plan put forward by the Arab League to end the suffering of Syrians. Bashar al-Assad has never been more isolated. A rapid transition to democracy in Syria has garnered the resounding support of the international community. Change must now come."

The uprising in Syria - influenced by the Arab Spring movement that forced regime change in Egypt and Tunisia - was sparked about a year ago in the southern city of Daraa with demonstrators angered by the arrests of young people who scrawled anti-government graffiti.

Their grievances and calls for reforms were met with a violent security crackdown, and the unrest there served to catalyze anti-government ferment across the nation.

Thousands have died in the crackdown - well over 5,000, according to the United Nations. But the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, an opposition activist group, puts the toll at well over 7,000.

The resolution calls on Syria to end human rights violations and attacks against civilians immediately. It condemns all violence "irrespective of where it comes from" and "calls on all parties," including "armed groups," to halt violence.

Along with urging the government to cease violence, the resolution calls on it to protect the population, release prisoners "detained arbitrarily" during recent events, withdraw security personnel from cities and towns to barracks, and "guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstration."

It also calls for an "inclusive" and violence-free "Syrian led political process."

"This resolution strongly condemns Assad's 11-month campaign of murder and torture. It demands an end to the killing machine," Rice said in her statement. "It demands that the Syrian government release all political prisoners; assure the freedom of peaceful demonstrations; and guarantee full and safe access to Arab League representatives and international media, and to humanitarian aid workers, who seek only to protect a people who have endured unimaginable violence."

"The international community has just given its firm support to the Arab League's plan to facilitate a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system, 'in which citizens are equal regardless of their affiliations or ethnicities or beliefs.' The only question is how many more

women, men and children - from demonstrators on Syria's streets to those taking shelter in homes and hospitals - will suffer or be killed by Assad before that transition begins."

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