

# No progress in talks on Syrian constitutional committee

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JEDDAH: Two-day talks on Syria concluded on Friday in Astana, Kazakhstan, without notable progress on forming a constitutional committee to drive a political settlement in the war-torn country.

A joint statement by the three cosponsors – Iran, Russia and Turkey – said the meeting had broached the issue of the constitutional committee with the UN special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen. Further talks in Geneva would be needed, it added.

Syrian opposition spokesman Yahya Al-Aridi blamed the Assad regime for the stalemate in the talks, telling Arab News: “It doesn’t want a political solution.”

He said: “The regime in particular is obstructing the formation of the constitutional committee in accordance with UN resolution 2254. The regime gets support from Iran in creating hurdles.”

He added: “Russia seems to consider itself a substitute to the UN, when in fact the UN should be the one in charge and the facilitator of negotiations and implementing (resolution) 2254.”

Al-Aridi said the Astana process had a two-fold goal from the start. “The military aspect ... was aborted into something called de-escalation zones, but the regime and its supporters turned them into escalation zones,” he added.

“The humanitarian aspect was to establish confidence-building measures, but the regime didn’t do that either.”

Al-Aridi said the issue of the release of prisoners from the regime’s jails was insisted upon in every Astana round, but the regime failed to act.

“Russia said it tried over 300 kinds of weapons on Syrian soil, which means it’s very much for military action, but in the media they portray themselves as favoring a political solution,” he added. “If there’s any terrorism that needs to be fought, it’s the state terrorism of the regime.”

He said “cunning” Iran, which has “a vicious plan for the region,” is out to destroy the Syrian social fabric with its militias.

Bahia Mardini, a human rights campaigner and founder of Syrian House, an organization dedicated to helping Syrians in the UK, told Arab News: “It’s clear that there’s disagreement between the guarantor countries (Iran, Russia

and Turkey) over Syria, and that the Russian-American conflict over Syria is still there.”

She urged the international community “to find a real solution that will consolidate democracy and establish a future for Syria on the basis of international resolutions.”

She added: “We call for an end to the suffering of the Syrians ... and their participation in building and redrawing the future through a political solution that will lead to the implementation of (resolution) 2254, all relevant international resolutions and the Geneva Declaration to restore the unity of Syrian soil and heal wounds.”



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More than 7,000 Syrians quit camp near Jordan border  
Syria negotiators reach Kazakhstan for peace talks

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# 60 Palestinians hurt in Gaza border clashes

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Fri, 2019-04-26 17:45

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories: At least 60 Palestinians were injured during clashes Friday along Gaza's border, including 36 shot and wounded by Israeli fire, the health ministry in the coastal enclave said.

"60 people were injured by (Israeli) occupation forces" and of these 36 were shot by live fire, ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra told AFP.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said approximately 7,000 "rioters and demonstrators" had gathered in multiple spots along the heavily-fortified border.

Demonstrators "hurled rocks and a number of explosive devices" toward troops, she said, with forces responding in "accordance with standard procedures."

Palestinians in Gaza have taken part in often violent demonstrations along the Israeli border fence for more than a year, calling on the Jewish state to end its blockade of the territory.

At least 265 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the demonstrations began in March 2018, the majority during the border clashes. Two Israeli soldiers have been killed.

Israel accuses Gaza's rulers Hamas of orchestrating the protests and using them as cover for attacks.



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Israeli tank, aircraft hit Gaza after cross-border shots: army  
Palestinian teen killed by Israeli fire in border clashes: Gaza ministry

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## [Russian air strikes kill 10 civilians in Syria's Idlib: monitor](#)

Fri, 2019-04-26 19:10

BEIRUT: Air strikes by regime ally Russia killed 10 civilians in the rebel-held region of Idlib in northwestern Syria Friday, a war monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said those killed included two children.

The raids took the lives of three civilians including a boy on the outskirts of the town of Kafranbel, and seven including a girl in the town of Tal Hawash, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Russia and rebel-backer Turkey in September inked a buffer zone deal to

prevent a massive regime offensive on the Idlib region, near the Turkish border.

But the region of some three million people has come under increasing bombardment since former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham took full control of it in January.

The latest air raids came as two days of talks on ending the war in Syria - sponsored by Russia, fellow regime ally Iran, and rebel backer Turkey - concluded in Kazakhstan.

In a statement released by the three countries after the meeting, they expressed concern about HTS extending its influence in Idlib.

They stressed their “determination to continue cooperation in order to ultimately eliminate” HTS and Daesh, the statement said.

Syria’s war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since the conflict began with the repression of anti-government protests in 2011.



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## Saudi Arabia, the UAE, UK and US hold Yemen talks in London

Fri, 2019-04-26 17:34

LONDON: Saudi Arabia and the UAE met in London on Friday to discuss with the UK and US the next steps in the Yemen peace process.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir took part in the meeting of the Yemen Quartet.

The UK Foreign Office said the meeting discussed how best to support the efforts of UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths.

A ceasefire between Yemeni government troops and Houthi militants was agreed for the key port of Hodeidah in December during talks in Sweden. But the implementation of the truce has stalled and the Arab Coalition supporting Yemeni forces has accused the Iran-backed Houthis of dozens of violations. The coalition includes Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

“I called this meeting so that we keep doing everything we can to move forward on the hard road to peace in Yemen,” UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said. “This is a horrendous conflict and it is taking too long to turn the ceasefire agreed in Stockholm into a durable path to peace.”

The meeting was also attended by the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nayan, and David Satterfield, a US acting assistant secretary of state.



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Yemen troops foil Houthi attackArab coalition jets target Houthi drone sites in Yemen's capital

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## [Sudan protesters hold prayers outside military headquarters in campaign for civilian rule](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-04-26 12:37

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters performed the weekly Muslim prayers outside army headquarters on Friday, a day after vast crowd of

demonstrators flooded Khartoum to demand the military rulers cede power. Protesters have massed outside the army complex in central Khartoum since April 6, initially to demand the overthrow of longtime leader Omar Al-Bashir. But since his ouster by the army on April 11, the protesters have kept up their sit-in, demanding that the military council that took over hand power to a civilian administration.

Despite international support for the protesters, the 10-member council has so far resisted, although three of its members resigned on Wednesday under pressure from the street.

The resignations triggered jubilation among the protesters, who massed in their tens of thousands on Thursday in response to a call from their leaders for a "million-strong" march.

Despite the scorching heat, the protesters were back in numbers on Friday, an AFP correspondent reported.

"Freedom, freedom," they chanted as prayer leader Sheikh Matter Younis delivered the sermon.

"We will not retreat until we get our main demand of civilian rule," said Younis, an activist from Sudan's war-torn western region of Darfur.

He also called for the "symbols" of the old regime to be punished.

"They must face fair and transparent justice, they have to be held accountable," he said, as the protesters chanted "Blood for blood! We will not accept compensation!."

Another Darfuri, Harun Adam, said his family lived in Kalma, one of the sprawling camps that are still home to hundreds of thousands of people who were driven from their homes by the Bashir government's brutal response to the ethnic minority rebellion which erupted in 2003.

"I'm here since April 6," when the sit-in started, Adam told AFP.

"I'm ready to stay here for a year until we get our main demand, which is a civilian government and that all those who committed crimes be held accountable."

Behind him crowds chanted "One, two, three, four, we are all Darfur!"

The military council, led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, says it has assumed power for a two-year transitional period.

Protest leaders have held several rounds of talks with the council and the two sides have agreed to set up a joint committee to chart the way forward but there has so far been no breakthrough.

Washington has thrown its weight behind the protesters.

State Department official Makila James said on Tuesday that Washington supports "the legitimate demand of the people of Sudan for a civilian-led government" and urged all parties to work together to that end.

But at a summit hosted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on Tuesday, African leaders conceded that more time was needed for a transition to civilian rule.

Their statement angered the protesters who held a rally outside the Egyptian embassy on Thursday.

The African Union had taken a strong line setting an end of April deadline for the military council to hand power to civilians or face suspension from the 55-nation bloc.





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Sudan holds 'million-strong' protest march Sudan's army ruler vows to hand 'power to the people'