



Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of South Africa

PRESS-RELEASE

Remarks by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for the mass media upon the visit to Damascus, Syria

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We had a very useful meeting with the leaders of the Syrian Arab Republic – President Bashar al-Assad, Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.

We reaffirmed our willingness to do everything possible to promote an early resolution of the crisis based on the League of Arab States initiative proposed on November 2, 2011. The Syrian President assured us that he is fully committed to the objective of stopping violence regardless of where it may come from, as it is envisaged in the initiative. For this purpose Syria informs the Arab League about its interest in continuing the work of the Arab League observer mission and in increasing the number of the mission's employees in order for it to have representatives in all the troubled zones and be able to detect any violations of the principles related to stopping violence regardless of where it may come from.

We, for our part, reaffirm the words I said to the Arab League Secretary General Nabil el-Araby yesterday by telephone: Russia is convinced that it is necessary to preserve and expand the Arab League observer mission that in itself is an important stabilizing factor for Syria. The efforts to stop violence should be accompanied by a political dialogue between all Syrian political forces: the government, as well as the opposition groups. The Arab League supports this position as well. Today we have been assured that Mr. al-Assad is ready for this work. In particular, the Syrian President confirmed that the committee formed to carry out a nation-wide dialogue with all the opposition groups under the chairmanship of Syrian Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa has all the necessary authority to hold this dialogue. The President also urged those who could influence the opposition groups not yet willing to participate in the dialogue, to do so.

We also reminded our Syrian colleagues that the letter sent last year by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad called to accelerate the long overdue political reforms in the country, namely, in addition to the already adopted laws, to carry out the constitutional reform at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. al-Assad also informed us that in a couple of days he will meet with the committee that has been preparing the draft Constitution. This work is now finished. Immediately after the President receives the draft Constitution, the dates of the referendum on this most important fundamental Syrian law will be announced. The new Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic will become the basis for the general election in which, according to the new law (on political parties), a lot of parties will be participating. I repeat: the election will be held on the basis of the new Constitution that will not give any privileges or advantages to the Ba'ath Party.

In general, we think that this visit made on the instruction of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev was timely and useful. We have every reason to believe that the message about the need for vigorous activities in every direction that we brought to Damascus was understood. Our main point is that the efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis should be continued. Russia intends to actively engage in these efforts, including in the framework of the ongoing contacts with Syria, as well as with its neighbors and the Arab League.

We will continue working with various opposition groups that for different reasons have not agreed to participate in the nation-wide dialogue. In our opinion, the states whose influence on these groups is far greater than that of the Russian Federation should work with them as well. We are guided by a simple and understandable argument: deaths of civilians, regardless of who is responsible for them, are unacceptable. The region needs peace, Syria needs peace. Outside forces should work to promote the dialogue, agreement and reconciliation, and avoid any intervention or incitement.