

Syria Urged to Step Up Peace Plan

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Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Mousalem visiting Moscow for a discussion. **Denis Sinyakov**

Russia urged the Syrian government Tuesday to act "more decisively" to implement international envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan but said the opposition must also comply and called on others to use their influence to promote a cease-fire.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking after talks with his Syrian counterpart, balanced a message of pressure on Syrian President Bashar Assad's government with pointed words for his foes and for Western and Arab states.

"We told our Syrian colleagues ... we think their actions could be more active, more decisive in regard to the fulfillment of the points of the plan," Lavrov told reporters at a joint briefing with Walid Moualem.

Moualem said Damascus had already pulled back some of its troops from cities and that Syria wanted a say in the composition of an international team to observe implementation of a cease-fire.

"We spoke very frankly about this," Lavrov said. "We are insistently demanding from our

Syrian colleagues the strict fulfillment of their commitments."

"It is clear that success is possible only if the rest of the members of the international community who have influence on the Syrian sides ... approach this task with the same sense of responsibility."

Moscow "cannot ignore the well-known fact that Annan's proposals still have not been accepted by several, if not the majority of, opposition groups, including the ... Syrian National Council," he said. Moualem said Damascus wanted guarantees from Annan that armed groups attacking its troops would commit to a cease-fire.

"We will not ask the terrorist groups, which are killing, kidnapping and destroying infrastructure, for guarantees. We want Annan to give us these guarantees," he said, adding that an end of violence "must be simultaneous with the arrival of the international observers."

He also said Annan told him in a recent telephone call that a cease-fire would be followed by disarming of the rebels.

He challenged Western and Arab states, which have pledged support for opposition groups and called for Assad's exit.

The United States and other nations with influence on the opposition would do better "not to point at Russia and China but to set their levers in motion to ... force everybody to stop shooting at one another," Lavrov said.

"We want once again today to call on all opposition [groups] and all states that have influence on the political and especially the armed opposition to use the influence with the aim of an immediate cease-fire by all sides."

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