

Lavrov Says Russia Would Back N. Korea Talks in Geneva

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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NEUCHATEL, Switzerland — Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Friday that his nation would welcome a fresh round of talks on Swiss soil over North Korea's nuclear program, if all the parties were to agree.

Flanked by his Swiss counterpart at a news conference, Lavrov supported renewed talks in Geneva, if Pyongyang were to agree to hold discussions with Russia, Japan, South Korea, the United States and China.

But both officials made clear there was no such general agreement.

"If we can re-establish that, Russia would, of course, support it," Lavrov, who spoke in Russian, said in response to a question.

North Korea agreed in principle in 2005 to scrap its nuclear program, including a presumed

small stockpile of weapons, in return for aid and diplomatic incentives from other members of the six-party talks. But Pyongyang walked out of talks in 2009 and later conducted more nuclear tests.

Recently, North Korea warned it has weapons "on standby" and aimed at its foes if provoked, but has not revealed specific plans to fire a missile or carry out another nuclear test.

Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter, who spoke in French, said his nation had offered to host such talks. "But, of course, that should be agreed by all parties and that is not the case at the moment," he said.

They spoke as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was visiting South Korea, where he sternly warned North Korea against test-firing a mid-range missile.

Lavrov came to Switzerland from the G8 foreign ministers' meeting in London, where he held talks with Kerry on issues including the North Korean and Syrian crises. In London, Lavrov urged a calm response from all toward North Korea's nuclear provocations.

Switzerland also has offered to try to defuse the crisis on the Korean Peninsula by mediating between the United States and North Korea. Switzerland and Sweden help monitor the demilitarized zone that was created after the Korean War ended in 1953, with an armistice, not a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula still technically at war.

Switzerland brokers relations between the U.S. and Iran, and is home to the UN's European headquarters in Geneva, where peace talks and other negotiations are held regularly.

North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un reportedly attended school for several years in Switzerland, which also has maintained a humanitarian aid office in North Korea.

On Syria, Lavrov told the news conference in Neuchatel, a city at the foot of the Jura Mountains close to the French border, that Russia would support an international war crimes prosecution — eventually.

"Without any doubt, this aspect must be taken into account in this complex process, in the search for a final settlement for the future of national reconciliation in Syria," he said. "But at this stage, I think the first priority is to end the violence as fast as possible to avoid more civilian deaths."

Russia has been Syrian President Bashar Assad's staunch ally, supplying Damascus with weapons and shielding the regime from tougher UN sanctions.

"And these calls for not allowing impunity are totally correct," Lavrov added, "but what I notice is that certain people try to use that to slow down discussions and have the reconciliation process canceled, which will only lead to more deaths."

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