

Syrian Official Says Peace Conference Planned Nov. 23-24

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 17, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

Syria's deputy prime minister said Thursday that a long-delayed international conference aimed at ending his country's civil war was scheduled for Nov. 23 to 24 — though Russia, one of the meeting's main organizers, quickly cast doubt on the date.

Qadri Jamil said the timing of the "Geneva 2" conference, meant to bring Syria's government and opposition together, had been confirmed by the United Nations.

"This is what [UN Secretary General] Ban Ki-moon is saying, not me," he said.

But within hours of his statement, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich told reporters: "We should not get ahead of ourselves."

"It is not a matter for Syrian officials, but the responsibility of UN Secretary General to announce and set dates agreed with all sides," he added.

The deal reached last month for Syria to scrap its chemical weapons rekindled efforts to convene the conference, which Russia and the U.S. have been trying to organize since May.

Jamil has made several visits to Russia during the conflict, which has killed more than 115,000 people since it began in March 2011, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

He said the conference was needed because "everyone is at a dead end — a military and political dead end."

"Geneva is a way out for everyone: the Americans, Russia, the Syrian regime and the opposition. Whoever realizes this first will benefit. Whoever does not realize it will find himself overboard, outside the political process."

Talks to schedule the conference were rekindled after U.S. and Russian officials agreed last month on a deal to destroy Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons by next year.

The world's chemical weapons watchdog is confident it will be able to meet the deadlines set by the deal even though some sites are in disputed or rebel-held territory, a special adviser to the organization's director general said Thursday.

Inspectors from The Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, which won the Nobel Peace Prize last week, have visited nearly half of more than 20 sites declared by Damascus, said Malik Ellahi, special adviser to Director General Ahmet Uzumcu.

"We are on track. The team is confident, the morale is high and cooperation from the Syrian authorities has been forthcoming," he said.

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