

UN Urged to Take Lead in Securing Peace Dialogue in Syria

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- United Nations should take lead in encouraging dialogue among stakeholder groups inside Syria
- Consequences of civil war in terms of the refugee crisis will be felt for years
- Talk is of peace but preparations are for war
- More information about the meeting is available at <http://wef.ch/mena13>
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Dead Sea, Jordan, 26 May 2013 - With growing demands for the international community to arm and support Syrian opposition groups, a regional expert speaking at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa has called on the United Nations to take the lead in encouraging dialogue among the multiplicity of stakeholder groups inside Syria. "The region is on a knife-edge and if we are to prevent the conflict in Syria engulfing the region, we must bring together all those with a stake in Syria's future to decide where their interests lie and arrive at a new equation for sharing power," said Salman Shaikh, Director Brookings Doha Center, Qatar.

Alexander Aleinikoff, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, described the huge burden borne by neighbouring states now sheltering 1.5 million refugees. UN estimates suggest these numbers will double by the end of the year if the exodus continues at its current rate. "The priority now is to get the international community to end the violence of a conflict whose consequences will, in any event, be felt for years to come because, as in the Balkans after the wars there in the 1990s, refugees will be slow to return," he said.

Aleinikoff defended the UN from criticisms that it is not doing enough inside the country to help

people living in areas outside government control or to provide cross-border aid. "We would like to

operate across lines inside the country and across borders, but we need the green light from either

the UN Security Council or the Syrian government, and neither is forthcoming,” he said.

The moderate opposition, which is now the focus of Western efforts to change the equation on the ground, has little presence or credibility inside Syria, speakers said. “The weakness of the opposition in Syria is a direct result of the efforts of the Assad regime to decimate civil society, “ said Sarah Leah Whitson, Executive Director, MENA Division, Human Rights Watch. “If we don’t want more broken vases in the region, we need to look at the way other regimes treat civil society in their countries.”

“As people talk of peace they are actually preparing for war,” Shaikh said. “Listening to Senators McCain and Menendez at the World Economic Forum here one got the distinct impression that the consensus in the US is shifting towards influencing events on the battlefield, including through arms for the opposition and surgical air strikes,” he added.

More than 900 participants from over 50 countries are taking part in the World Economic Forum

on the Middle East and North Africa. The three-day meeting, convening under the theme *Advancing Conditions for*

Growth and Resilience, will focus on shaping the region's economic, social and governance systems of the future.

The Co-Chairs of the meeting are: [Mohammed H. Al Mady](#), Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC), Saudi Arabia; [Samer S. Khoury](#), President Engineering and Construction, Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), Greece; [Ibrahim S. Dabdoub](#), Group Chief Executive Officer, National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait; [Jin-Yong Cai](#), Executive Vice-President and Chief Executive Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Washington DC; [Martin Senn](#), Group Chief Executive Officer Zurich Insurance Group, Switzerland; and [Mina Al Oraibi](#), Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, United Kingdom.

Notes to Editors

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