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UN withdraws Iran invitation to Syria talks

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United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has rescinded his invitation to Iran to participate in the forthcoming international conference aimed at achieving a political solution to the Syrian crisis under pressure from the United States.

Speaking at a press briefing at the UN headquarters in New York on Monday, UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said Ban is "deeply disappointed" at Iran's statements rejecting the June 2012 Geneva communiqué.

"Given that it has chosen to remain outside that basic understanding, he has decided that the one-day Montreux gathering will proceed without Iran's participation," Nesirky added.

The 2012 Geneva communiqué outlines measures for a transition of power in Syria, and its key demand means Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will have to step down.

On Sunday, the UN chief said Iran has been invited to the Geneva II conference. "As I have said repeatedly, I believe strongly that Iran needs to be part of the solution to the Syrian crisis," he stated.

But the United States, Britain, Saudi Arabia and the foreign-backed Syrian opposition were strongly opposed to Iran's participation in the event.

The US said the UN must take back its invitation unless Tehran publicly backs the 2012 roadmap to establish a transitional government in Syria, and the so-called Syrian National Council (SNC) threatened to skip the Geneva II conference entirely.

However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the upcoming international talks about the Syrian crisis will resemble "hypocrisy" without Iran's participation.

"Among the countries also invited [to the Geneva conference] are Australia, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Japan, Brazil, India, Indonesia, and many others. So if there is no Iran in this list... I think the peace talks will resemble hypocrisy," Lavrov said on Monday.

He emphasized that Iran is among the countries that has a direct interest in the settlement of the Syrian crisis "without any additional damage to the stability of this most important region of the world."

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham said on Monday that Iran is participating in the upcoming Geneva conference without accepting any preconditions.

"We accept no precondition for participating in the Geneva II [conference] and, based on the official invitation [we received], Iran will take part in the conference without [any] preconditions," she stated.

On November 25, 2013, the United Nations set January 22 as the date for the Syria peace conference. The event is scheduled to be held in Switzerland in two parts. On January 22, the opening session of the event will be in the Swiss city of Montreux and then it will be moved to the UN office in Geneva on January 24.

Syria has been gripped by deadly crisis since 2011. According to reports, the Western powers and their regional allies -- especially Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey -- are supporting the militants operating inside the country.

According to the United Nations, more than 100,000 people have been killed and millions displaced due to the turmoil that has gripped Syria for over two years.