

Russia Ready to Condemn Syria

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Tanks stationed Monday in Hama, as posted on a social media web site.

AMMAN, Jordan — The death toll in Syria's bloody crackdown on opponents of President Bashar al-Assad in the city of Hama and elsewhere climbed on Tuesday, and Russia said it would not oppose a UN resolution to condemn the violence.

Russia, an old ally of Syria, had long resisted any such measure by the UN Security Council, where it holds a veto. The Foreign Ministry in Moscow cautioned that any resolution should refrain from sanctions and other unspecified "pressures."

Human rights campaigners said assaults by Assad's forces across Syria on Monday and Tuesday had killed at least 27 civilians, including 13 in the city of Hama, where troops and tanks began a violent operation to regain control on Sunday.

That brought the total to about 137 dead throughout Syria in the past three days, 93 of them in Hama, according to witnesses, residents and rights campaigners.

Syria's state news agency said "armed terrorist groups" had killed eight policemen in Hama. The government blames such groups for most killings in the five-month revolt, saying more

than 500 soldiers and security personnel have died.

Consultations at the Security Council on Monday failed to produce agreement on adopting a Western-backed draft resolution condemning Syria or settling for a less binding statement.

The Russian Foreign Ministry's Middle East and North Africa Department chief, Sergei Vershinin, said his country was not "categorically" against adopting a UN resolution on Syria.

"If there are some unbalanced items, sanctions, pressure, I think that kind of pressure is bad because we want less bloodshed and more democracy," he added.

Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad urged India to ignore Western "propaganda" during its month-long presidency of the Security Council, which began on Monday.

Italy recalled its ambassador from Syria in protest of the "horrible repression of the civilian population" and urged other European Union members to do the same.

The EU formally added five more Syrian officials to an existing list of 29 individuals headed by Assad.

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