The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Offers Rival UN Resolution on Syria

August 28, 2011



UNITED NATIONS — Russia has introduced a rival UN resolution on Syria that calls for Bashar Assad's government to halt its violence against protesters and expedite reforms, but makes no mention of the sanctions sought by the United States and European nations.

Envoys from Britain and Germany said they welcomed Russia's decision to seek any Security Council action on Syria. But they said Russia's proposed resolution was weaker than the statement the group had issued earlier this month on the Syrian government's violent crackdown on the opposition.

"This is a situation where continued activity by the Security Council might be helpful, if it is pushing the parties in the right direction," Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said Friday.

Russia's draft resolution calls on the Syrian government to "expedite the implementation of the announced reforms in order to effectively address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of Syria's people."

The Russian draft calls for an immediate end to all violence, stresses that the only solution to the current crisis is "an inclusive and Syrian-led political process," and urges the opposition to engage in political dialogue with the government.

Churkin circulated the proposal Friday, two days after strongly hinting that Russia would veto a U.S. and European-backed resolution calling for an arms embargo on Syria and the freezing of assets controlled by Assad and key supporters of his regime. The stronger resolution backed by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and the United States was circulated on Tuesday.

Churkin told reporters that "a very important envoy from Moscow" would travel to Damascus on Aug. 29.

British Deputy Ambassador Philip Parham said Russia's backing of any resolution on Syria was a "good thing," but "the question, of course, is what the resolution should say."

"We want to gain consensus on something that will really get us moving in the right direction," Parham said, expressing hope that council members could reach a compromise.

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