

Russia Welcomes Accord on Syria Chemical Arms Probe

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Free Syrian Army fighters holding their weapons as they stand on a pick-up truck in Deir al-Zor on Saturday. **Khalil Ashawi / REUTERS**

Russia has welcomed an agreement reached between the United Nations and Damascus on sending inspectors to investigate alleged chemical weapons use in Syria, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

“Moscow welcomes the principal agreements reached to start the work of the group of international inspectors in Syria that, although late, open the way for a thorough and unbiased investigation of the situation around the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Friday.

Inspectors are to depart for Syria soon to start the investigation that could take up to two weeks. Under the agreement, reached with the Syrian government Thursday, the visit may be extended by mutual consent.

The UN team is expected to visit three sites where chemical weapons attacks allegedly occurred. One site is the town of Khan al-Assal, in Syria's northern Aleppo province, where the Syrian government claimed rebels used chemical weapons in March. The two other locations are being kept secret for safety reasons.

Both sides in the ongoing Syrian civil war have traded allegations of chemical weapons use. The UN investigators team had been unable to travel to Syria because of diplomatic wrangling over the scope of the access they would have.

Syria said it was ready to grant the UN team access to Khan al-Assal. The UN, however, said it wanted to investigate other alleged attacks, including at Homs in western Syria, where the Syrian army has been accused by rebel forces of having used chemical weapons.

Syria held large stocks of chemical weapons prior to the outbreak of the civil war there, including VX, Sarin and Tabun nerve agents, according to Global Security.org. Damascus is not a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman blamed Washington on Friday for having made an "awkward statement" on August 12 when it claimed that convening the long-delayed Syrian peace conference in Geneva was being hampered by the Syrian leadership's refusal to take part in the conference "without preconditions."

Lukashevich said it was the Syrian opposition that refused to attend the conference "without preconditions" and said the U.S. statement practically "turned upside down" the situation over the convening of the Geneva conference.

The conference is designed to be a follow-up to last summer's international meeting in Geneva that drafted a peace road map for Syria.

At least 100,000 people are believed to have died since fighting broke out between Syrian government forces and rebels in March 2011, according to the latest UN figures.

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