

# UN Secretary-General to Attend Moscow's Victory Day Celebrations

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Russian servicemen march during a rehearsal for the Victory parade, with the Kremlin's Spasskaya (Saviour) Tower seen in the background, on Moscow's Red Square, May 4, 2015.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will visit Moscow for Victory Day celebrations this Saturday, the UN has confirmed.

UNESCO chief Irina Bokova will accompany Ban during the visit for “the celebration of Victory Day on May 9,” UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Monday.

Ban will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin before returning to New York on May 10, Dujarric said.

On his way to Moscow, Ban will visit Ukraine on May 8 and meet with President Petro Poroshenko. Ban will also attend May 7 celebrations marking the end of World War II in Gdansk, Poland, and meet with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski, Dujarric said.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin criticized Ban's reported plans to visit Russia, saying last week that it would send a "completely wrong message" after Moscow's annexation of Crimea and amid its support for separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine.

He said Ban may have "a number of reasons" to visit Poland, Ukraine and Moscow, adding: "But I very much hope that the Secretary-General won't be present at the 9th of May parade in Moscow."

Many Western leaders are staying away from the Victory Day parade in protest of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel will visit Moscow the day after the parade to lay flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier together with Russian President Vladimir Putin, but she won't attend the May 9 festivities, her office said.

"The chancellor considers it important to mark the joint remembrance of the end of the Second World War and the liberation from Nazism," but "in view of the Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine participating in the military parade was not appropriate," Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert was quoted by Germany's DW as saying.

Some of Russia's allies, such as Belarus and North Korea, also said their leaders would not be attending.

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko said he would visit Moscow for two days before the parade, but would be celebrating the May 9 anniversary of the victory in World War II in his own country.

North Korea, which had indicated that its leader Kim Jong Un might attend, cancelled those plans less than two weeks before the festivities. Instead, Kim Yong Nam, the head of the presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, will be attending, North Korea said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has attributed the cancellation of Kim's visit to North Korea's "internal affairs."

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