

Arab League turns to UN as Gulf observers quit Syria
Reuters
January 25 , 2012

BEIRUT, Jan 25 — Gulf Arab states withdrew their observers from Syria yesterday after it rejected an Arab League plan for President Bashar al-Assad to surrender power, prompting the group's chief to call for UN help in ending Syria's bloody upheaval.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem accused the League of plotting to engineer foreign intervention. Thousands of civilians and members of security forces have been killed in the 10-month-old uprising against Assad.

Despite Syria's anger, Moualem agreed to extend by a month the mission of the remaining Arab League observers who are monitoring implementation of a plan to end the bloodshed. But he scornfully rejected the League's latest proposal.

"Definitely the solution in Syria is not the solution suggested by the Arab League, which we have rejected. They have abandoned their role as the Arab League and we no longer want Arab solutions to the crisis," Moualem said.

"Heading to the Security Council will be the third stage in their plan, and the only thing left is the last step of internationalisation," he told a news conference in Damascus.

"They can head to New York or to the moon. So long as we are not paying for their tickets it is none of our concern."

The revolt in Syria was inspired by others that have toppled three Arab leaders and the bloodshed has battered Assad's standing in the world, with Iran among his few remaining allies.

Yesterday, the death toll rose to 26 by the evening, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Fifteen were killed in clashes between state forces and armed rebels in the flashpoint province of Homs.

Arab League officials said 55 Gulf Arab observers were being withdrawn while the other 110 members of the team would continue work in Syria.

State news agency SANA said Moualem told Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby that Damascus had agreed to extend the monitoring mission until February 23.

The Gulf Cooperation Council states said in a statement they were "certain the bloodshed and killing of innocents would continue, and that the Syrian regime would not abide by the Arab League's resolutions."

Elaraby and Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani, who heads the League's committee on Syria, sent a joint letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon giving details of the organisation's latest plan for a political solution in Syria.

The letter asks for a "joint meeting between them in the UN headquarters to inform the

Security Council about developments and obtain the support of the Council for this plan," a League statement said.

The Saudi ambassador to Britain, Prince Mohammad Bin Nawaf, said the idea of resorting to the Security Council was to rally the world behind the Arab League peace initiative for Syria.

"We pulled out (the monitors) because we didn't see any positive response from the Syrian government. But it is a process. Take it to the UN Security Council to get the support on that initiative," he told journalists in London.

"We hope it doesn't reach an escalation of a military intervention. The last thing we want is an unstable region. We hope the Syrian regime will comply with the Arab initiative. I think this is the logical way out, a peaceful solution, a peaceful transition. I think this is the only hope they have."

Gulf Arab walkout

Moualem poured contempt on the League's call for Assad to hand power to a unity government to defuse the violence.

He said that while "half the universe is against us," Syria's long-time ally and arms supplier Russia, which wields a veto on the Security Council, would never permit foreign intervention. "That is a red line for them."

Still, the Arab League's call for a change of Syrian government, coupled with the diminution of the monitoring mission, will raise pressure on the Security Council to overcome its divisions and act to stop Syria's bloodshed.

More than 5,000 people have been killed since the revolt erupted in March, according to the United Nations. Damascus says "terrorists" have killed more than 2,000 soldiers and police.

What began as civilian street protests has escalated into an armed insurgency in some regions as Assad has sought to crush unrest with troops and tanks.

The presence of the monitors has not halted the violence, as envisaged under a peace plan Damascus approved. The Arab observers deployed late last month to assess Syria's compliance with an earlier Arab League plan.

"There has been some progress, but there has not been immediate or complete implementation as the Arab initiative requires," Elaraby said yesterday, adding that he would name a special envoy to Syria this week.

A Syrian opposition group condemned the mission's leader, Sudanese General Mohammed al-Dabi, for a report in which he highlighted violence by Assad's adversaries as well as by the president's security forces.

The Syria-based Local Coordination Committees criticised Dabi for equating "the butcher and the victim," saying he had "blurred the monumental hardship that millions of Syrians experience every day while they rise to reach freedom, dignity, democracy and a wise system of governance."

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said the Security Council's silence on Syria was scandalous, but that the Arab League call for Assad's removal was "a glimmer of light."

The Arab League's request for the Council to endorse its plan will force could be a "game changer," Germany's UN envoy Petter Witting said, and may finally force the world body to take a stand on Syria's crisis. — Reuters

Reuters

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/arab-league-turns-to-un-as-gulf-observers-quit-syria/>