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## Representatives of Syrian Opposition Meet in Astana

BY MALIKA ORAZGALIYEVA in INTERNATIONAL on 6 OCTOBER 2015

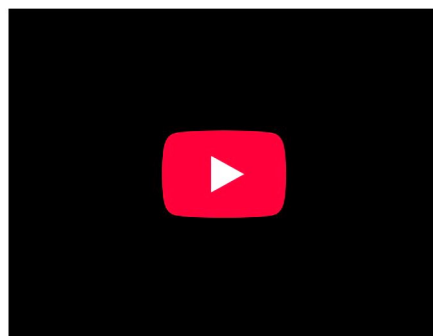
ASTANA – Representatives of the Syrian opposition held a fresh round of consultations in Astana Oct. 2–4.



Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Askar Mussinov and Director of the French Centre for Political and Foreign Affairs Fabien Baussart mediated the talks. Secretary of State of Kazakhstan Gulshara Abdykalikova offered opening remarks.

Abdykalikova emphasised that Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev supports initiatives to restore trust in international relations and strengthen peace and security based on international law. To this end, just a few days prior, Nazarbayev proposed a 2045 Global Strategic Initiative during the United Nations General Assembly, she said.

According to Abdykalikova, Kazakhstan hopes for the continuation of



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talks between the Syrian authorities and the opposition in the framework of the Geneva process. “We want to give a hand to the Syrian people, who are experiencing great difficulties, in particular, food and medicine [shortages]. Kazakhstan supports efforts by the UN, the League of Arab States, the U.S., Russia and other stakeholders in Syria and believes the crisis must be resolved through genuine political dialogue between Syrian authorities and the opposition,” Abdykalikova said.

She noted that Kazakhstan hosted a meeting of Syrian opposition leaders, which provided an opportunity to discuss the political situation in Syria and possible solutions, such as the creation of a provisional government, on May 25–27. The negotiations were based on the following key agreements: a need to follow the Geneva principles in finding a solution, the condemnation of all forms of terrorism and a collective call to end foreign paramilitary involvement, she stressed.

Abdykalikova noted that this round of talks included higher level representatives than previous discussions.

Following the talks, the parties signed a declaration that envisages further measures of resolution for the Syrian crisis and the organisation of meetings.

The participants thanked Kazakhstan’s government, particularly President Nazarbayev, for providing a dialogue platform to address the Syrian crisis.

“During the first round of consultation, a number of documents were signed with initiatives to counter the crisis. In the second round, initiatives on the rapid solution of the Syrian crisis were added,” Syrian politician Randa Kassis said.

The participants of the second round, “Astana-2,” paid special attention to the electoral process, emphasising the fact that elections should be open to all citizens, regardless of their location in the country or abroad.

In addition, it was decided to establish new reforms or to reform some of the constitution clauses that do not currently allow for fair elections, to create a new committee of negotiators, as well as fight against terrorism.

“I want to emphasise one point, which was not discussed during Astana-1. We once again ask [for the release of] prisoners captured by terror operatives. We have agreed with initiatives to participate in

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elections in February 2016,” Kassis added.

The second round was attended by 37 people, including representatives of different political offices.

Earlier this spring, representatives of the Syrian opposition publicly asked Kazakhstan to host talks on the Syrian crisis. Nazarbayev accepted their proposal to help in hosting talks on the civil war in Syria. Following intense and complicated negotiations in Astana, the participants issued a joint statement in Arabic on May 28 titled “Astana Declaration for a Political Solution in Syria.”

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