



### Syria Talks Break Down with No Substantial Progress Made

The latest round of constitutional talks between the Syrian government and the opposition have once again broken down. The negotiations were hosted by the United Nations in Geneva, and it is feared that this most recent failure will likely further hamper the already sluggish peace process. The constitutional committee was formed with the goal to find common ground on issues like governance, structure of public authorities, and state identity. Established in 2019, it includes representatives from the regime, the opposition, and civil society members. Opposition figures have condemned the regime for not taking the talks seriously. Along with the government's lack of sincere engagement, issue experts have pointed out that another significant barrier to the process is that many key stakeholders are also absent from the negotiating table. Furthermore, because of the focus on the constitutional aspect, critical topics such as alleviating the humanitarian crisis, promoting security, ending the violence, and expanding freedom rarely receive the necessary attention in discussions.

The United Nations has said that a political solution is the only way out of the bloody stalemate, but so far after 7 rounds of talks, there has been very little progress. The continued aggression and lack of cooperation from the Assad regime mixed with the absence of unity in the opposition are the two main factors that have stopped any real progress in negotiations. Despite meeting on and off for nearly 3 years, the constitutional committee has yet to decide on whether it will amend the existing constitution or rewrite it entirely. The committee was intended to be a way to open up more political tracks, not to be the sole avenue for peace talks. Additionally, some critics have said that the traditional two-sided format, as opposed to a multi-faceted one, does not allow other important parties to voice their opinion.

The conflict has largely halted on the ground. Syria remains divided up into 4 major groups. 70% of the country is controlled by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, while the remaining 30% is divided up between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham, and the Turkish-backed rebels. The war, which started in 2011, has claimed the lives of at least 500,000 people and displaced millions more. It started with the Assad regime's brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests. 14.6 million Syrians are currently in dire need of humanitarian aid. Though there is aid flowing, it is often inadequate to meet the needs of the people there. The number of Syrian civilians who are food insecure has dramatically increased recently and there is not enough aid to go around. There is also the new risk that Russia may shut down the border crossing due to poor relations with the West. This would be catastrophic to the people living there.

Another issue on the horizon is Syria potentially renewing relations with the Arab League. During 2011, Syria was kicked out of the league in an attempt to isolate the country because of the Assad regime's brutal and inhumane crackdown against the pro-democracy movement. A recent visit by Syrian officials to the United Arab Emirates may signal warming relations with other nations in the Middle East. This is troubling because it would take away a large motivator for the Assad regime to negotiate with the Syrian opposition.