

Activists: No signs Syria carrying out peace plan
By Joe Sterling, CNN
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Even though Syria has signed off on a U.N.-backed peace initiative, activist groups said there's no evidence yet that the regime is carrying out the plan on Wednesday.

At least 15 people, including two military defectors, were killed on Wednesday as security forces fired shells and rockets, staged raids, and clashed with resistance fighters, the opposition Local Coordination Committees of Syria said. The group also is calling for urgent help to reach and treat people in Saraqeb, a city in Idlib province under assault from the forces of President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

"So far we haven't seen anything concrete to indicate the regime is implementing anything of the sort," LCC spokeswoman Rafif Jouejati told CNN. "As of 7:40 this morning, regime forces were still shelling Idlib, and it looks like the military deployment in parts of Aleppo is growing."

Another activist group agrees.

"As far as we know, the Syrian regime has taken none of the steps laid out in the six-point peace plan mapped out by Kofi Annan," said Dima Moussa, spokeswoman for the Revolutionary Council of Homs. "Several neighborhoods in the city of Homs are under shelling by mortars, while snipers are still targeting anything that moves. It is hard to believe that the Assad regime is serious about observing the points of the proposal, despite allegedly agreeing to it, when the regime and its tools continue their practices of randomly killing and bombing Syrian cities."

The regime accepted the six-point plan presented by Annan, the joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, the United Nations said Tuesday. Annan urged the government to immediately implement the proposal.

The plan calls for a U.N.-supervised halt of violence by the government and opposition; timely humanitarian aid; speeding up the release of "arbitrarily detained" people; ensuring "freedom of movement" for journalists; and respecting peaceful demonstrations and "freedom of association."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Syria's acceptance an "important initial step" and urged al-Assad "to put those commitments into immediate effect. There is no time to waste."

"Mr. Annan is working urgently with all parties to secure implementation of the plan at all levels. I sincerely appreciate his tireless efforts and the evident support he is receiving from the international community," Ban said on Wednesday in Kuwait City. Annan plans to brief the U.N. Security Council in a closed meeting from Geneva, Switzerland, on Monday.

Diplomats reacted hopefully but skeptically, because al-Assad has made other commitments calling for an end to violence during the year of carnage.

The United Nations estimates that the Syrian conflict has killed more than 9,000 people since a government crackdown on protesters began last March; opposition activists have put the toll at more than 10,000.

"Given al-Assad's history of overpromising and underdelivering, that commitment must now be matched by immediate actions," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Tuesday. "We will judge Assad's sincerity and seriousness by what he does, not what he says."

The LCC said "it appears" that the Annan plan "will meet a fate no better than that" of the "infamous" Arab League initiative and observer mission that began late last year and continued for several weeks until it was suspended. The Arab League urged an end to the crackdown and a withdrawal of troops from cities, but the violence continued to rage.

"The regime declared restrictions on several provisions of the plan, rendering it devoid of any meaning and making it a sterile technical formality to be 'negotiated' indefinitely, citing 'internal affairs' as the justification," the LCC said of the Arab League initiative.

The LCC said Annan's plan "buys the regime more time to assassinate more activists." The international community must come up with a "practical mechanism" that protects Syrians, political free expression, and a better future, the LCC said.

"Such an initiative must establish a timetable, methods, and safeguards for the transfer of power, and must enable activists to create a framework for the present and future of their country. Anything short of these demands would be pointless," the LCC said.

World powers have been unable to stop the violence. The United States has been focused focused on sanctions and political pressure.

This week, U.S. President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan talked about enhancing ways to provide "nonlethal" aid such as medical supplies and communications equipment to the opposition.

Arab and other voices have called for supplying arms to the Free Syrian Army, the fledgling anti-regime rebel force.

Some Sunni tribal leaders in Iraq, such as Sheik Abu Ahmed, say they feel obligated to send arms and fighters to help Syrian rebels as they watch the Syrian regime hammer their fellow Sunni tribesmen. Ahmed said he has sent more than \$300,000, machine guns, AK-47s and about 30 fighters into the Syrian province of Deir Ezzor.

Syria is expected to be a hot topic at this week's Arab League summit in Baghdad.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari has said "an updated and distinct resolution" will be presented to Arab leaders.

Syria, which has been suspended from the group over the clampdown, will not deal with any initiative issued by the Arab League during its absence from the group, state media reported, citing a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Jihad Maqdasi.

U.S. Sens. John McCain, R-Arizona, Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, and Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut independent, this month called for "foreign airpower" to stop the government "slaughter" and save innocent lives. They also called for establishing safe havens that could serve as bases for military aid.

McCain and other senators unveiled a resolution on Wednesday condemning Syria's "crimes against humanity." It called on senators to recognize Syrians' "inherent right to defend themselves," support calls by Arab leaders to help Syrians defend themselves, and urge Obama to work with allies on how and where to create safe havens for citizens.

The Syrian government routinely blames the vaguely defined "armed terrorist groups" for violence in the country, while most reports from inside Syria suggest the government is slaughtering civilians in an attempt to wipe out dissidents.

CNN cannot independently confirm reports from inside Syria because the government severely restricts access by international journalists.