

UN Syria Mediator to Attend Peace Conference in Russia

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – **United Nations Syria mediator Staffan de Mistura will attend a peace conference in Russia next week, the United Nations said on Saturday.**

“The Secretary-General is confident that the Congress in Sochi will be an important contribution to a revived intra-Syrian talks process under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva,” UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

Western powers and some Arab states believe the conference in Sochi is an attempt to create a separate process that would undermine the United Nations’ efforts and lay the groundwork for a solution more suitable to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his allies Russia and Iran.

The UN decision to send its envoy to the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in the Russian Black Sea

resort of Sochi comes despite the Syrian opposition’s calls for the boycott of the event.

The next round of intra-Syrian national dialogue between Damascus and the opposition would commence in Sochi on Monday. On Thursday, Russia said some 1,600 people had been invited to the talks aimed at resolving the years-long crisis in the Arab country.

Last December, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed to hold the congress in Sochi on January 29-30. While the Syrian government at the time immediately announced that it would attend the event, 40 Syrian “opposition” groups rejected the Russian initiative, which is also aimed at agreeing on a post-war constitution in the Arab country.

Earlier this week, Syria’s main opposition group, the Saudi-affiliated Syrian High Negotiations Commission (HNC), announced



The UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, attends a press statement at the UN office in Vienna on January 27, 2018.

that it would need further details before it could make a final decision on whether to take part in the event, which dozens of opposition armed groups have already rejected.

Eight rounds of Syria peace talks, which took place in the Swiss city of Geneva, failed to achieve tangible results, mainly due to the opposition’s insistence that the Syrian government cede power.

Iraqi Popular Forces Find Mass Grave in Kirkuk



Iraqi soldiers check a mass grave they discovered in Hamam al-Alil area on November 7, 2016, after they recaptured the area from Daesh terrorists.

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – **Iraqi fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units have found a mass grave in the country’s northern province of Kirkuk, which contained the bodies of dozen of civilians believed to have been executed by Daesh terrorists when they were**

in control of an area there.

A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) that the pro-government fighters, better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha’abi, made the discovery in the al-Riyad re-

gion of Hawijah, located 45 kilometers west of the provincial capital city of Kirkuk.

On January 9, Iraqi police official Omar al-Hajjar said security personnel had found a mass grave containing the bodies of at least 20 women tortured and killed by Daesh near the northern city of Mosul.

Hajjar added that the victims were executed “as they were trying to escape toward the eastern side of the city during the liberation offensives last year.”

He said the bodies of the victims along with their identity cards “have been transferred to the forensic medicine department in Mosul to be returned to their relatives.”

Iraqi legislator Haji Kendor told Arabic-language al-Ghad Press news agency on December 29, 2017 that search teams had found a mass grave that contained the

bodies of 80 elderly and disabled women, near the town of Sinjar, situated over 400 kilometers northwest of the capital Baghdad.

Kendor added that some of the victims had been buried alive, noting that Daesh terrorists had buried the women from the Izadi minority group in a fish farm, and the grisly discovery was made by local search teams.

Back in August 2014, Daesh terrorists overran the town of Sinjar, killing, raping, and enslaving large numbers of Izadi Kurds.

The region was recaptured in November 2015, during an operation by Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Izadi fighters.

The Office of Kidnapped Affairs in the northern Iraqi city of Dohuk said last year that around 3,500 Izadi Kurds were still being held captive by Daesh, adding that a large proportion of the abductees were women and children.

UN:

30 African Refugees Drown After Boat Capsizes Off Yemen

SANAA (Press TV) – **The United Nations says at least 30 African refugees have drowned when their boat capsized off the coast of Yemen this week with reports that their smugglers opened fire on those on board.**

The UN refugee and migration agencies said in a joint statement on Friday that there were at least 152 Somalis and Ethiopians on board the overcrowded boat which departed from Aden in southern Yemen on 23 January.

“The vessel is believed to have been operated by unscrupulous smugglers who were attempting to take refugees and migrants to

Djibouti, while also trying to extort more money from these refugees and migrants,” the statement added.

The vessel “capsized amid reports of gunfire being used against the passengers”, the UN agencies said, adding that it was working with the Yemeni coast guard to try to find out what happened.

“At least 30 people have died in this tragic incident” which occurred near the coast, the statement said.

At least 13,600 people have been killed since Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign against Ye-

men in an attempt to reinstall Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Yemen’s former president and a staunch ally of Riyadh, and to crush the Houthis Ansarullah movement. The Saudi campaign, however, has failed to achieve its goals.

The UN Refugee Agency said it was “outraged” by the latest casualties.

“Prolonged conflict and insecurity in Yemen continues to expose vulnerable refugees and migrants to heightened risks of human rights violations including arbitrary arrest, detention, trafficking and deportation,” the agency tweeted.

Last August, scores of African refugees died after they were forced from two boats into rough seas off Yemen by smugglers.

Yemen’s lawless southern regions, which are mostly controlled by militants loyal to Saudi Arabia and Yemen’s resigned president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, have become a fertile ground for smugglers who vow to transfer refugees from the region to wealthier Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

However, most of those smugglers leave refugees at sea as they fear being arrested by militants or Saudi Arabia’s military forces.

Gazan Unearths Ancient Graves in Backyard

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – **When Abdul Karim al-Kafarnah went to check the rainwater gushing down a hole in his garden he was in for quite a shock – hidden steps led him down to an ancient grave complex.**

The 24-year-old lives in the Beit Hanoun district of the Gaza Strip by the border which suffered intensive bombardment during the 2014 conflict between the Zionist regime’s army and Palestinian fighters.

The family home was destroyed and the surrounding plots heavily churned up, leaving extensive craters in the ground.

The flash-flooding earlier this week led him to one particular spot, where, on removing a

large stone, he found a staircase leading four meters (13 feet) down into an ancient tomb.

“I discovered the place where the water was falling in,” he told AFP.

“I lifted the stone and a stale smell came out.”

As he descended he found a total of nine graves, with piles of bones in some of them -- seemingly containing more than one body each. He also found votive lamps and other pottery.

Gaza-based archaeologist Ayman Hassouna said the finds suggested the grave dated back to the Roman era, 2,000 years ago.

“The burial and excavation methods in this

tomb date it back to the Roman period but it may have continued in use into the early Byzantine period (5th to 7th centuries AD),” he said.

Professor Jodi Magness, an archaeologist at the University of North Carolina, said such tombs were relatively common in the Holy Land between 100 BC and 100 AD, and again between 300 and 500 AD.

“Typically, these were family tombs, or sometimes larger tomb complexes could be divided up among families,” she told AFP.

Gaza was a prosperous port in the Roman and early Byzantine periods and boasted many ancient monuments that have since been lost.

Massacre...

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said an ambulance approached the checkpoint and blew up. The target was apparently an interior ministry building but the victims were mainly people who happened to be in the street.

Buildings hundreds of meters away were shaken by the force of the blast, which left torn bodies strewn on the street amid piles of rubble, debris and wrecked cars.

The casualty toll is the worst since 150 people were killed in a truck bomb explosion last May near the German embassy, an attack that prompted a major reinforcement of security aimed at preventing similar vehicle-borne attacks.

With much of central Kabul now a heavily fortified zone of high concrete blast walls and police checkpoints, there were angry questions about how the bomber had been able to get through and set off the blast.

“Officials must be held responsible,” said former deputy Interior Minister Mohammad Ayub Salangi.

People helped walking-wounded away as ambulances with sirens wailing inched their way through the traffic-clogged streets of the city centre.

“I was sitting in the office when the explosion went off,” said Alam, an office worker whose head was badly cut in the blast. “All the windows shattered, the building collapsed and everything came down.”

The Swedish and Dutch embassies as well as the European Union mission and an Indian consular office are also nearby but there were no reports that any of their staff had been hurt in the attack.

Tillerson...

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“The U.S. has greater concerns and more immediate concerns about regarding Iran’s malign behavior throughout the region,” Tillerson said.

He accused Iran of supporting Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, arming regional militias and destabilizing Syria and Iraq. Tillerson said the U.S. would also be looking to work with Europe to address these issues.

“The work is under way, if it was easy it would have already been done,” he said.

Turkey...

(Continued From Page One)

coordination would be carried out in order to avoid misunderstandings,” it said.

The agreement is likely to be seen by Ankara as a substantial diplomatic victory from the incursion, where Turkish troops and their militant allies appear to have made modest advances, as heavy rain and poor weather have hampered airstrikes and progress on the ground.

Turkey’s foreign minister said the United States needed to follow up its promise with concrete action, including the immediate withdrawal of its troops from the vicinity of Manbij.

“The United States needs to break its link with [the] terrorist organization and make them drop their weapons completely. They need to collect the weapons they gave, they need to withdraw from Manbij immediately,” Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters Saturday.

The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment about ending arms to the YPG or exiting Manbij.

Erdogan said this week that Turkish forces would sweep Kurdish fighters from the length of Syrian border and could push all the way east to the frontier with Iraq, a move that would risk a possible confrontation with U.S. forces allied to the Kurds.

Any drive by Turkish forces toward Manbij, part of Kurdish-held territory some 100 km east of Afrin, could also threaten U.S. position. The United States has about 2,000 troops in Syria without permit from the Syrian government or a UN mandate.

U.S. forces were illegally deployed in and around Manbij to carry out training missions in the area.

A senior official for the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, a group of militants spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG, said any wider Turkish assault would face an “appropriate response”.

Redur Xelil also said in an interview that he was sure the U.S. was trying to put pressure on Turkey to limit its offensive.

Turkey and its so-called Free Syrian Army militant allies have killed a total of 394 militants since the incursion began, Erdogan said Saturday. Turkey and the FSA militants have together lost 20 people he said, without giving a breakdown.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitoring group, said that 36 civilians in Afrin, including 10 children, have died so far.

A total of 59 YPG fighters and at least 69 fighters from the Turkey-backed FSA have died in clashes, the Observatory said. Seven Turkish soldiers have been killed and another seven are missing, it said.

U.S....

(Continued From Page One)

It often mass murdered government employees and security forces as well as any civilians who rejected the group.

Just on Friday, Iraqi authorities found a mass grave in Iraq’s northern Kirkuk Province, containing the bodies of some 75 civilians and security personnel executed by Daesh.

Kirkuk’s Governor Rakan Said al-Juburi told AFP that residents and shepherds had guided security forces to the mass grave, found in Hawija, one of the last urban localities held by Daesh before it was defeated.