Turbulence ahead of Syria peace conference

Tuesday, 21 January 2014 11:27

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has withdrawn his invitation to Iran to participate in upcoming talks on peace in Syria, voicing "deep disappointment" that Iranian public statements were totally inconsistent with oral assurances he had been given.

Iran and Russia, the key backers of the battled Syrian regime, have condemned the United Nation's retraction of the invitation made to Tehran a day before the United Nations conference on ending the nearly three-year-old Syrian civil war inaugurates.

Mr. Ban announced he had invited Iran to attend the conference's opening in Montreux, Switzerland, on Wednesday after Foreign Minister Javad Zarif assured him that his country understands that the basis of the talks is full implementation of an action plan adopted in the so-called Geneva Communique of 2012 , which calls for a transitional government to lead to free and fair elections.

"The Secretary-General is deeply disappointed by Iranian public statements today that are not at all consistent with that stated commitment," Mr. Ban's spokesperson, Martin Nesirky, said in a statement at UN Headquarters in New York.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has described the UN move as a mistake, but not a

catastrophe. "The absence of Iran will not contribute to efforts to ensure the unity of the Muslim world, including in fighting terrorism, which is a threat to all of us and all Muslims as well," according to Lavrov.

The urgent need for results in Syria becomes more pressing each day. Today, according to a new report by three former war crimes prosecutors, there is clear evidence that Syria has systematically tortured and executed about 11,000 detainees since the start of the uprising.

The investigators examined thousands of images of dead prisoners reportedly smuggled out of Syria by a defector. The figure of 11,000 victims documented in the 55,000 photographs is allegedly just the tip of the iceberg, representing the numbers in one location only, and with a large number of the images (27,000) taken by one official photographer.

The report, commissioned by Qatar, is based on the evidence of a defected military police photographer, referred to only as Caesar, who along with others reportedly smuggled about 55,000 digital images of some 11,000 dead detainees out of Syria.

Source: UN News, Al Jazeera, BBC

More information on Syria in UNRIC:s library backgrounder