
JOINT SESSION ON SYRIA UNDER WAY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Kazakhstan has said a new round of talks on the Syria conflict backed by Russia, Turkey, and Iran and endorsed by the United Nations is under way after a day's delay.

A plenary session involving Russia, Turkey, and Iran as well as delegations from the Syrian government and opposition was also announced on February 16, a Kazakh Foreign Ministry official said at a press briefing in Astana.

Kazakhstan on February 15 said talks had been moved one day to February 16 for unspecified "technical reasons."

Bilateral consultations ahead of the plenary session are reported to have been under way since February 16, as parties seek an end to the conflict that has claimed more than 300,000 lives since 2011.

A rebel spokesman, Yehya al-Aridi, said on February 15 the opposition was participating, but as a "smaller" delegation than the one it sent for the talks in Astana last month, when it refused to negotiate directly with Damascus.

The Syrian regime is represented in Astana by its ambassador to the UN, Bashar al-Jaafari.

Jaafari has told Russian agency RIA Novosti that one-on-one meetings between the opposition and the government were "not planned."

The first round of talks on Syria that took place in Astana last month did not result in any significant breakthrough.

UN envoy on Syria Staffan de Mistura said from Moscow, where he met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, that he would not participate personally in the latest Astana meeting but that his office would be represented by a "technical team."

Kaynak/Source: