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## U.N. Council Backs Plan for Ending Syria Conflict

By RICK GLADSTONE



Tatan Syuflana/Associated Press

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke in Jakarta on Wednesday.

Overcoming months of bitter division, the United Nations Security Council delivered a diplomatic setback to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria on Wednesday, unanimously embracing efforts by Kofi Annan, the former secretary general, to negotiate a cease-fire in the year-old Syrian conflict, funnel aid to victims and begin a political transition.

In a document known as a presidential statement, the 15-member council expressed its “gravest concern at the deteriorating situation in Syria, which has resulted in a serious human rights crisis and a deplorable humanitarian situation.” Russia and China, which had used their vetoes on the council to block efforts to adopt a resolution on the Syrian conflict, agreed to the statement.

It endorsed a plan by Mr. Annan, publicly revealed in detail for the first time, that he presented to Mr. Assad in meetings this month as the special representative of both the United Nations and the Arab League.

The statement said Mr. Annan’s plan would “facilitate a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system, in which citizens are equal regardless of their affiliations or ethnicities or beliefs, including through commencing a comprehensive political dialogue between the Syrian government and the whole spectrum of the Syrian opposition.”

The plan closely resembles an Arab League proposal that Mr. Assad has rejected. It calls for all combatants to immediately stop fighting, for the military to withdraw from populated areas, for a United Nations-supervised truce and for the provision of humanitarian assistance, the release of all arbitrarily detained people, freedom of movement for journalists and freedom for peaceful demonstrations.

It warns of unspecified “further steps” if Mr. Annan’s plan is not carried out.

The statement does not have the enforcement muscle of a formal Security Council resolution. But it reflected some significant diplomatic bridging of disagreements that had principally pitted Western and Arab countries against Russia, Mr. Assad’s most important supporter.

Russia’s endorsement of the statement is an embarrassment for Mr. Assad, who has refused to negotiate with his political opponents and has characterized the uprising as a terrorist crime wave.

There was no immediate reaction from Mr. Assad. But the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency, in a brief dispatch on the Security Council’s action, emphasized that it satisfied Russia’s insistence that it contain no ultimatums, threats or “unilateral demands.” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who

had expressed anger over Russia's support for Mr. Assad, praised the Security Council's action as "a positive step."

"The council has now spoken with one voice," she added.

Mr. Annan said through a spokesman that he was "encouraged by the united support of the Security Council and urges the Syrian authorities to respond positively."

Russia, backed by China, had twice vetoed earlier draft resolutions on Syria, arguing that they would violate Syria's sovereignty and did not equally blame Mr. Assad and his armed antagonists for the crisis.

But Russian officials have shown increasing impatience with Mr. Assad, and on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov said Mr. Assad had made "many mistakes" over the past year.

Speaking to reporters after the Security Council session, Russia's ambassador, Vitaly I. Churkin, sought to frame the unanimous action as a vindication of Russia's position. "We are very pleased," he said. "The Security Council has finally chosen to take a pragmatic look at the situation in Syria."

The Security Council also issued a press statement, which Russia had proposed, that condemned the bombing attacks on Syrian government targets in Damascus and Aleppo in recent days, for which Mr. Assad has blamed his opponents. The press statement described those attacks as terrorism.

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