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## U.N. Votes to Send Observers to Syria Amid a Shaky Truce

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Shaam News Network, via Reuters  
Buildings in Homs, Syria, which the opposition said were damaged by government forces.

BEIRUT, Lebanon — As low-level violence sputtered in various Syrian cities on Saturday, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to send an advance team of up to 30 military observers to begin monitoring the tenuous cease-fire.

It was the first time since the Syrian uprising began 13 months ago that the Security Council put its full weight behind a concrete proposal to stop the violence, with Russia and China joining the rest of the 15-member Council to authorize the observer mission.

And the resolution put new pressure on Syria to take its troops off the streets and to open a dialogue with the opposition, both crucial aspects of the six-point plan aimed at ending more than a year of violence that has left at least 9,000 people dead by the United Nations' count.

The resolution was delayed for a day by wrangling with Russia over its demand that the opposition also be held responsible, and changes in the wording reflected that.

“We need to keep building on this fragile process,” said Vitaly I. Churkin, the Russian envoy. He raised questions about plans announced by supporters of the opposition to finance its fighters, concerns echoed by the Syrian ambassador, both saying it would undermine the peace plan.

The advance team drawn from nearby United Nations missions is expected to be sent immediately, and Syria has agreed to permit its entry. Negotiations with the Syrian government for a larger monitoring mission of 250 observers will also start.

Most Security Council members put the onus for sticking to the cease-fire on the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

“We’re under no illusions,” said Susan E. Rice, the American ambassador to the United Nations. “Just this morning, Syrian forces resumed their brutal shelling of Homs and opened fire on mourners in Aleppo, raising renewed doubts about the sincerity of the regime’s commitment to a cease-fire.” Asked if she thought that was a violation of the cease-fire she said, “Absolutely.”

In Syria, sporadic shelling from the government’s armed forces again struck Homs, activists said, with explosions and gunfire heard repeatedly day and night.

The casualty toll reported by both sides was at least six dead. A video posted online showed what was said to be the body of a man in Homs marooned on the street by what seemed to be periodic shells and sniper fire. Another video showed black smoke rising from apartment buildings.

A second man who was killed during the shelling barrage in Homs was identified as Samir Shalb al-Sham, a photographer who had specialized in documenting the destruction wrought on the city.

“He was one of the most important photographers because he was keen on documenting everything and was never afraid,” said Walid Fares, an activist reached via Skype. “He would follow tanks and film them, go under gunfire to film the regime’s violations.”

Mr. Fares said that Mr. Sham had stayed at his house and went out around 11 a.m. to film. “We were waiting for him to return, and we are still waiting,” he said, choking up with emotion.

At least three other people were killed when government forces opened fire at a funeral in Aleppo that turned into an antigovernment demonstration, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an activist group. It said the troops fired live ammunition and tear gas. A gruesome video said to have been shot Saturday showed a young man taking what appeared to be a sniper round right in the head, blood and life pouring out of him as he was dragged back into a mosque.

Antigovernment protesters took to the streets again in cities and hamlets across Syria. Their smaller-than-anticipated numbers were a reflection of the fear of the security forces, which have maintained a heavy presence.

The government accused the opposition of assassinating a law enforcement officer in the countryside near Damascus and critically wounding a second. An army colonel near Hama and a parliamentary candidate in the north were both kidnapped, according to the state-run news media.

“The terrorist groups escalated crimes of killing and sabotage in an attempt to foil Annan’s mission,” said a report on state-run television, referring to Kofi Annan, who negotiated the truce as the joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League. The report also accused the Obama administration of doing the same with its announcement that it would supply so-called nonlethal aid to the opposition, including bulletproof vests and binoculars. (The pictures used to illustrate the report showed what were said to be assault weapons and bullets that had been seized.)

“We are hoping these isolated incidents will not provoke full-scale hostilities,” said Ahmad Fawzi, the spokesman for Mr. Annan. “This is the time for restraint on both sides.”

In addition to observers, the free movement of journalists inside Syria envisioned under the Annan plan has not been allowed, making independent confirmation of claims from either side impossible to corroborate. But both sides agree that violence has markedly dropped since the truce went into effect Thursday.

Russia has a lot riding on the success of the cease-fire. As Syria’s main foreign patron, it had vetoed two previous Security Council resolutions aimed at stopping the violence.

At the United Nations, changes in the text of the resolution reflected Russian demands. For example, multiple references emphasizing that the government respect the six-point peace proposal were removed and replaced by a version that included the text of the plan as an appendix, and the overall tone was softened.

The original had condemned widespread violations of human rights by the Syrian government, while the revised version also mentioned “any human rights violations by armed groups.” The version put forward by the United States and its European allies, as well as Colombia, has said the observers should have the right to meet privately with individuals or groups without government interference, but the final version limited it to individuals.

Another resolution will be required before the full team of 250 observers can be sent, but diplomats said it would basically echo the resolution approved on Saturday. The Security Council requested that the United Nations secretary general make a formal request for a full monitoring mission by this Thursday.

After the Council’s vote, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reiterated his stance that Syria bore “the primary responsibility to stop the violence and withdraw its forces.” *Hala Droubi contributed reporting.*