SYRIA: UN back in the game – New initiatives after Annan’s visit to Damascus

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On the anniversary of the protests against the Assad regime, the UN gets back in the game with new initiatives (such as the one announced in Geneva) aimed, over the short run, at stopping the repression. Italy’s decision to suspend the activities of its embassy in Damascus was followed by announcement from the six Gulf region monarchies of the intention to close their diplomatic missions because the Syrian regime “continues to massacre its own people”. The dramatic proportions of the situation have also led Turkey to invite its citizens in Syria to come home as a result of the “serious risk” to their safety. The UN’s expected initiatives stem essentially from UN and Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan’s recent mission, which he reported on in the UN Security Council.

The package Annan presented to Assad included the immediate cessation of the violence, access to humanitarian relief organisations and political dialogue. These proposals have Italy’s full consensus, and the decision to close our embassy in Damascus is a concrete demonstration of that. According to Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, his country is using its contacts with the Syrian regime to convince Damascus to cooperate with the UN envoy: “We are working on a daily basis with Kofi Annan and sending signals to Damascus to convince the Syrian leaders to cooperate fully with his mission”, Lavrov stated. “We are relying on the support of all the forces in the Security Council meeting in New York with Annan”, Lavrov added. “That means that it is not only up to us and China to send signals to Damascus”.

Meanwhile, UN chief of humanitarian aid in Geneva, Valerie Amos, announced that a joint mission made up of the Syrian government, the United Nations and the Conference on Islamic Cooperation will begin assessments on the ground, visiting the Syrian cities of Homs, Dara’a and Hama. The mission will be led by the Syrian government and will gather “first hand” information on the humanitarian situation in various cities and villages. Amos also reiterated the appeal to Damascus to allow humanitarian organizations “unobstructed” access “so they can bring help to the people who need it in a neutral and impartial manner”.

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