



31 January 2014 - According to the United Nations/Arab League mediator, the first round of talks ended with no serious breakthrough or “any real change in position” of either side.

[Speaking to reporters](#) in Geneva after what he described as a “fairly long meeting” where the two sides discussed “sensitive” matters regarding the security situation and terrorism in Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States said that the first round of talks would wrap up after a little more than a week.

“Friday morning will be our last session. I hope that we will try...to draw some lessons about what we did and see if we can organize ourselves better for the next session. I think that’s enough for a beginning,” said Mr. Brahimi, expressing the hope that when the talks reconvene – reportedly in February – “we will be able to have a more structured discussion.”

Since the conflict erupted in March 2011 between the Government and various groups seeking the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, well over 100,000 people have been killed and nearly 9 million others driven from their homes. More than 9.3 million people within the country need humanitarian aid, the UN has said, with over 2.5 million of them living in areas where access is seriously constrained or non-existent.

Overall, Mr. Brahimi said, “we haven’t noticed any major change, to be honest, in the two sides’ positions,” and he expressed deep disappointment that there was no movement on allowing UN aid convoy into Homs, and on allowing civilians to leave the besieged city, cut off from supplies.

“I am ...very, very disappointed, because the situation in Homs is bad and has been bad for months, years even. That is the first place very bad fighting and destruction has taken place,” he said, though he added that negotiations are still ongoing.

Turning to another issue of major concern, Mr. Brahimi said that negotiations have also been under way regarding the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, and today, some aid has gone in. “So, a partial solution in Yarmouk, but no solution yet in Homs,” he said.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) has confirmed that was able to deliver aid to the residents trapped in Yarmouk.

While noting that the two sides agreed today that “terrorism does exist in Syria and that is a very serious problem”, Mr. Brahimi said no agreement was reached on how to deal with it. However, the rival delegations did agree to hold a moment of silence to honour victims of the civil war – “no matter which [side] they belong to.”

In his press statement on Friday, Mr Brahimi noted that "the gaps between the sides remain wide; there is no use pretending otherwise. Nevertheless, during our discussions, I observed a little bit of common ground – perhaps more than the two sides realize or recognize. I suggested we resume, on the basis of an agreed agenda, on 10 February 2014. The delegation of the opposition agreed to this date. That of the government said they needed to consult with Damascus first. For all the Syrians trapped in this war, our work here will seem far too slow. I understand that. But we are trying to overcome the very difficult issues that have led to this war, and this unfortunately takes time."

Video statement by Special Envoy Mr Lakhdar Brahimi on 31 January: <http://webtv.un.org/watch/lakhdar-brahimi-joint-special-representative-for-syria-press-conference-geneva-31-january-2014/3129576497001/>

UNRIC library backgrounder on Syria: <http://www.unric.org/en/unric-library/26585>