

Beat: News

U.N. deputy envoy to Syria asks permission to leave post

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USPA News - Mokhtar Lamani, the Damascus representative of United Nations-Arab League Syria envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, has asked permission to quit his post for personal reasons, a UN spokesman said on Monday. It comes after he previously criticized the failed Geneva II talks.

Lamani, who is a Canadian national, has not released an official explanation for his decision to leave his post, but UN spokesman Martin Nesirky confirmed that the request to leave the Syrian capital was made for personal reasons. "We do not have a reaction per se but wish to confirm that Mr. Mokhtar Lamani has indicated that, having served some 18 months as the Head of our Office at Damascus, he would wish to leave his post for personal/family reasons," Nesirky said when asked about the request. The spokesman said that Lamani's request was being considered on Monday as "Damascus is not a `family duty station` and, therefore, UN staff members currently serving in Syria are not allowed to have their families with them in Syria." Lamani previously expressed great disappointment over the failed Geneva II talks in January and February. He appeared to be frustrated with the results and claimed that there had been a lack of preparation prior to the talks and a lack of political will needed to carry out successful negotiations. The news came as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon indicated the need for a third round of talks between the Syrian government and the opposition. "The only way to end the crisis is through a negotiated solution. We are determined to bring the parties back to the table here in Geneva," Ban said. Lamani was appointed as Head of the Office of the Joint Special Representative for Syria in Damascus in September 2012 and has played a crucial role in negotiating local ceasefires. Prior to his employment in Damascus, Lamani worked at the Organization of the Islamic Conference Representative to the UN in New York and as the Representative and Special Envoy of the Arab League to Iraq in 2006-2007. The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, similar to those across the Middle East and North Africa. The Syrian government violently cracked down on the protests, setting off an armed conflict between pro-Assad forces and anti-government forces. The United Nations estimates that more than 100,000 people, many of them civilians, have been killed and millions more have fled to neighboring countries since the start of the uprising that has escalated into a full-blown civil war. Opposition groups estimate the number of deaths has already exceeded 200,000, but those figures cannot be independently verified.

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