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Subject: Fw: Deutsche Presse-Agentur -- Al-Moallem confirms that Syria will attend peace conference
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Al-Moallem confirms that Syria will attend peace conference

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Beirut (dpa) - Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem confirmed Tuesday to UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi that the Syrian government will attend planned peace talks in Geneva.

Al-Moallem told Brahimi that **Syria** would take part in the talks, which are aimed at ending the country's 31-month conflict, "on the basis of the Syrian people's exclusive right to decide upon their political future and choosing their leadership, rejecting any form of foreign interference," state television reported.

No date has been set for the conference, but the Arab League has said it might take place on November 23-24.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, meanwhile, has sacked deputy prime minister Qadri Jamil, one of two representatives of minor opposition parties in the cabinet.

Jamil, known to be close to Russia, was dismissed for "absence... from his place of work without prior permission and failure to perform his duties," state news agency SANA reported, quoting the prime minister's office.

The former deputy prime minister and long-time communist activist had also "engaged in activities and meetings outside the country without coordinating with the government and without respecting official procedures," the office said.

Jamil, who has made a number of statements suggesting that the war in **Syria** is at a stalemate, is currently in Moscow.

Earlier, Brahimi met with Hassan Abdel-Azim, the head of the National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change, which, unlike the armed opposition in the country, is calling for political reforms and a peaceful transition.

Brahimi had arrived in Damascus on Monday as part of a regional tour ahead of peace talks planned in Geneva.

The UN envoy was expected to meet President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday, "if the meeting at the Foreign Ministry goes well," a Syrian security source told Lebanon's pro-al-Assad al-Mayadeen television.

Syria has accused Brahimi of being biased after he called for "real, not cosmetic change" in **Syria** this year and accused al-Assad of "resisting the aspirations of his people."

Al-Assad in an interview last week with al-Mayadeen said he would welcome Brahimi back to Damascus as long as "he sticks to his mandate and does not overstep it."

"He is tasked with a mediation mission," al-Assad said. "A mediator should be neutral."

Brahimi's visit, the first to Damascus since December, comes as he hopes to press members of the opposition Syrian National Coalition to take part in the Geneva conference.

In Geneva, the World Health Organization confirmed an outbreak of polio in **Syria** for the first time in 14 years.

Ten young children were confirmed as suffering from the disease, which can cause paralysis, with another 12 possible cases under investigation, WHO spokesman Oliver Rosenbauer said.

The WHO has linked the outbreak to the 31-month-old civil war, which is estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people and displaced over 5 million others. It said all patients are babies or toddlers aged 2 or less. None had been able to receive an adequate immunization amid the conflict.