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New UN Mediator Begins First Visit to Syria

10/09/2014



The mediator traveled with his deputy, Ramzy Ezzedine Ramzy, by land from the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

De Mistura is scheduled to talk with officials from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and members of the domestic opposition, but it was not immediately known if he would meet with the country's embattled president, Bashar al-Assad.

The 67-year-old diplomat is the third international mediator trying to find a solution to the Syrian civil war, which has now entered its fourth year with over 200,000 people killed.

De Mistura, a former Italian deputy foreign minister, was appointed as special envoy by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in July.

He succeeds Algeria's Lakhdar Brahimi, who resigned May 31 amid a lack of progress.

The first person to hold the post was Kofi Annan, Ban's predecessor as UN chief.

The Damascus government welcomed the appointment of De Mistura, who has worked for the United Nations for 40 years and has carried out missions in difficult places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Syrian authorities have warned, however, that his activities "must respect national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs and respect the will and choices of the Syrian people."

Unlike predecessors Annan and Brahimi, De Mistura is said to be considering maintaining a permanent residence in Damascus, a UN source told EFE.

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