

Merkel: Assad must be included in Syria peace talks

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that President Bashar al-Assad should be involved in any Syrian peace talks amid pressure from the rising number of refugees from Syria.

Merkel made the comment on Thursday after [a European Union summit on the asylum seeker crisis](#).

"We have to speak with many actors; this includes Assad, but others as well," Merkel said. "Not only with the United States of America, Russia, but with important regional partners, Iran, and Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia."

The comments by the leader of Europe's biggest political and economic power come amid increasing signs that Western powers who were once insistent on Assad's departure may be softening their positions in a bid to end the war.

US Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday that although Assad must step down, that need not immediately be upon reaching a settlement to end the country's civil war.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond has made similar comments.

US-Russia talks

Russia and the US launched military talks on the Syrian conflict last week as Moscow increased its build-up of forces in the war-torn country.

But French President Francois Hollande, whose country is set to launch air strikes against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, insisted on Thursday that there could be no place for Assad.

"There can be no transition without his departure," Hollande said after the summit. "The future of Syria will not pass through Bashar Assad."

Merkel, Hammond, Hollande and the other EU leaders issued a statement after the Brussels summit calling for a new push for peace.

"As regards Syria, we call for a renewed UN-led international effort to bring an end to the war that has caused so much suffering and forced an estimated 12 million people to leave their homes," the summit statement said.

Source: AFP
