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Iranian foreign minister says path to rule of law begins as Syria constitutional committee meets

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Iran's foreign minister has hailed the first meeting of Syria's constitutional committee in Geneva, describing it as the beginning of a "path to the rule of law" in the Arab country following over eight years of war.

Upon his return to Tehran, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted: "Returned from Geneva where I met with Russian & Turkish FMs, & UN's Geir O. Pedersen, on eve of inauguration of Syria Constitutional Committee."

Referring to the multilateral talks with his Russian and Turkish counterparts and the UN envoy for Syria in Geneva, he said: "After years of devastating war, path to rule of law begins— thanks to Astana process. Difficult road ahead, but no other alternative."

His comments came a few hours after the opposing sides joined the UN's Pedersen for face to face talks in an attempt to resolve the ongoing crisis in the war-torn Arab country. The UN-backed peace talks on Syria are now underway in Geneva, as the representatives from the Syrian government and Western-backed opposition came together for the first time.

A total of 150 delegates representing the government, opposition and civil society on Wednesday met at a constitutional committee meeting held inside the Council Chamber of the United Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland.

The members of the constitutional committee, which took almost two years of consultations to

be formed, are tasked with reforming the Arab country's constitution before it is put to the vote of the Syrian people.

The UN hopes this will be a chance to begin formulating tangible agreements between the rival side, but Russia and Iran have warned this is just the beginning of a long and difficult process.

In a joint communiqué released at the end of a separate meeting with Pedersen on Tuesday, Iran, Russia and Turkey stressed that Syria's long-awaited constitutional committee must work independently and far from any foreign interference in order to draw maximum support from all walks of the Syrian nation.

Addressing the Wednesday meeting with Syrian groups, Pedersen acknowledged the enormously difficult task ahead. "I know it is not easy for all of you to be here together in this room."

"But the fact you are here, face to face, is a powerful sign of hope for all Syrians, everywhere," he added. The UN envoy said reforming the country's constitution is the first step toward the beginning of a political process that will lead to UN-supervised elections under UN Resolution 2254.

However, he said, the process will have to be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned. "Do not expect me or my team to tell you what to write in your constitution. The future constitution belongs to Syrians, to the Syrian people and them alone."

Edited by Ed Newman

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