

## Russia and U.S. Clash on Stopping Violence in Syria

Hi again. Nice to have you with us on As It Is from VOA Learning English. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

There was more talk this week about how to stop the civil war in Syria. Tens of thousands of people have already died since the conflict began in March 2011. Journalist Andrew Tabler wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine this month that Syria is expected to reach 100,000 dead in August.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees says the number of people who have fled Syria so far this year is about the same as the total number of refugees all over the world in 2012.

President Barack Obama says Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has lost the right to rule. Mr. Obama says he believes Syria has used chemical weapons on its people. He says the United States will now provide military support to the rebels.

Leaders of major industrial countries discussed how to end the violence in Syria at the Group of 8 summit meeting in Northern Ireland this week. The biggest disagreement appeared to be between the United States and Russia.

Russia continues to provide weapons and other support to the Syrian government. President Vladimir Putin says it is important that Mr. al-Assad's government remain to provide stability for the country.

One observer, Chris Phillips of Queen Mary University, London, says Russia is defending Syria's right to govern itself.

"The Russians have always backed the principle of state sovereignty. As they see it, the Syrians have the right to conclude their affairs inside Syria as they wish. Russia itself is an autocratic regime and is not very keen on any major attempts to undermine the principle of state sovereignty, and they are going to stand by that."

Russia says there is no proof that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons on its citizens.

The Russian and American presidents did agree, however, to pressure the Syrian government and rebels to hold peace talks. The European Union and many Arab states, including Egypt, support a negotiated solution

But a few days later, Russia's foreign minister said Russia may not support the peace talks if the United States seeks a no-fly zone over Syria. And Vladimir Putin later criticized the American plan to give rebel groups weapons. Mr. Putin said he is concerned about who will take power if President al-Assad leaves. "Who will fill it?" Mr. Putin said. "Terrorist groups?"

Mr. Obama has not described the kind of military support the United States will provide to the rebels. But he told reporters that the United States is not starting a new Middle East war in Syria.

Also this week, the United Nations Children's Fund warned that hot summer weather is putting millions of children in Syria at risk of disease.

A UNICEF spokeswoman said children in Syria do not have safe water and good sanitation. These conditions put them at risk of diarrhea, measles and other diseases.

The spokeswoman said the availability of safe water in Syria is one-third what it was before the conflict.

Flamenco music is often associated with Spain. Gypsies from north India brought the music to Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But one American band is adding Arabic traditions, too. La Ruya includes sounds from Turkey, the Black Sea, Persia and North Africa. Christopher Cruise tells about their music.

Can you hear the Spanish guitar and heeled shoes in this music? They are some of the classic sounds of flamenco music. But a California band called La Ruya is transforming flamenco.

One of the band's founding members is Sam Foster. He is a drummer who became interested in Arabic and Turkish drumming. From there, he learned about flamenco. He brought in flamenco dancer Melissa Cruz and other musicians to create the unusual sound of La Ruya.

"We are taking forms and in some cases actual songs from other parts of the world and flamenco-izing them, so you have something new, a sound I haven't heard before."

"We have oud, which is the Middle Eastern lute. We have a flute player...The cajon, the box drum. And darbouka, the gourd drum, also known as dumbek."

And, says Melissa Cruz, they have the palmas.

“Palmas are flamenco hand claps. And typically it is the flamenco singer and the flamenco dancer who are doing the palmas.”

Wherever La Ruya performs, they find an interested audience.

“Flamenco is really improvisational, so there aren’t any strict rules or regulations. The point is to create one cohesive piece of music.”

Some say traditional Spanish flamenco should stay the way it is.

But Melissa Cruz says La Ruya’s style -- with its Arabic rhythms and instruments -- is not changing flamenco. Instead, it is bringing the music back to its Moorish roots.

I’m Christopher Cruise.

And I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

See you next time on As It Is. If you would like reach us, send an email to [learningenglish@voanews.com](mailto:learningenglish@voanews.com) Or go to our website at [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com) and click on “Contact Us.”