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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government Friday offered opposition rebels a prisoner exchange and ceasefire at the country's largest city in an attempt to entice the opposition National Coalition rebels to attend a peace conference next week, the BBC reported from Moscow.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem made the offering after meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and as the National Coalition, a grouping of exiled opposition rebels, met in Istanbul to decide whether to attend the Geneva II peace talks, scheduled to get underway in Montreux next Wednesday.

Reports from Istanbul said the rebels were divided on whether to attend the peace conference. The BBC said 44 of the 120 members of the coalition had already stated that they were against attending the conference.

The New York Times reported that the reluctance of rebels to attend peace talks was heightened by a recent letter that al-Moallem wrote to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon saying the government did not accept the terms of the official invitation to the talks.

The letter said the Syrian government's main concern was fighting terrorism and did not

mention the main aim of the talks, to define a transitional government to help end fighting that has left more than 130,000 people dead since 2011.

The New York Times quoted Oubab Khalil, the rebel Coalition's chief of staff in Washington, as saying that the letter demonstrated that al-Assad's government was not serious about negotiating a transitional government.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made a special statement on Thursday reaffirming that the goal of the conference was to agree on a transitional government in which both rebels and government negotiators would have veto power over potential candidates. U.S. President Barack Obama has said that al-Assad, whose family has ruled Syria for four decades, must step down as part of a solution to the conflict.

Al-Moallem earlier held meetings in Moscow with Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Both Russia and Iran back al-Assad's government. Russia, which will participate in the conference, has only said that a transitional government must be based on mutual consent from the two sides.

The Syrian Foreign Minister said the government would be willing to share lists of combatants held by each side to arrange a prisoner exchange. He said he had also presented a plan for a ceasefire in Aleppo, which with a population of 4.3 million in normal times, is Syria's largest city. Al-Moallem said the ceasefire for Aleppo could serve as a model for ceasefires elsewhere in the country.

The possibility of peace talks was strengthened last August after a chemical attack on Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, left hundreds of people dead. Washington threatened to attack government facilities in retaliation for the chemical attack, but finally accepted a Russian proposal requiring al-Assad to disarm his chemical weapons arsenal under international supervision.

But a report released Thursday questioned claims by Washington that the chemicals were delivered by rockets fired from government-controlled territory.

An investigation by former U.N. arms inspector Richard Lloyd and Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Theodore Postol found that the rockets used to deliver the chemicals had a maximum range of 2 kilometers while the extreme edge of the government was at least 5.5 kilometers away from where the rockets landed.

The Global Security Newswire also reported that the Syrian government did not list the type of rocket that was used as part of the inventory of its arsenal given to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is overseeing the international effort to eliminate the regime's chemical arsenal by the middle of this year.

It quoted former OPCW official Ralf Trapp as saying that the absence of the rockets from the disclosures "can mean the Syrian government doesn't have them, or that they are hiding them."

The new reports placed further doubt on who was responsible for the attacks, which were met with broad international condemnation.

OPCW Director General Ahmet Uzumcu said the southern Italian port town of Gioia Tauro had agreed to handle the transfer of hundreds of tons of the most deadly Syrian chemical weapons compounds from the ship that will transport them from Syria and onto a U.S. vessel that will neutralize the chemicals in international waters. The announcement ended months of uncertainty as to what port would accept to handle the transfer.

The OPCW said the port had been selected because it specialized in ship-to-ship transfers.

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