Denmark has joined Norway in offering to help destroy hundreds of tons of chemical-warfare materials amassed by Syria's embattled government, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told reporters on Wednesday.

Syrian President Bashar Assad admitted his forces possess chemical weapons and agreed to their destruction in September, after a nerve-gas attack weeks earlier raised the possibility of U.S. military intervention in his country's civil war. The leader agreed to the chemical arsenal's elimination, prompting a fast-track disarmament push overseen by United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The chemical-weapons watchdog on Wednesday said disarmament workers appeared set to meet a Nov. 1 deadline for destroying the Assad regime's technology for producing, mixing and loading chemical arms.

"What it means is that [Syria's government] will no longer have the capability to produce any more chemical weapons, and it will no longer have any working equipment to mix and to fill chemical weapons agent into munitions," OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan told reporters.

The U.N. chief said destroying the warfare chemicals themselves "will be the most challenging phase" when it begins at the start of next month.
Ban voiced appreciation for "very positive support" coming from a number of governments, but he declined to name which additional countries have offered assistance.

"Our joint [disarmament] mission led by Sigrid Kaag will be in close consultations with member states under the direction [and] guidance from myself" and OPCW Director General Ahmet Üzümcü, he said.

Whether NATO member nations would offer disarmament assistance was a closely watched question on Wednesday, when the 28-nation alliance wrapped up a meeting of its defense leaders and a separate gathering with Russian delegates.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told journalists he expects Moscow and alliance members "would stand ready to assist the U.N. and OPCW if requested."

He added, though, that participants in Wednesday's NATO-Russia Council meeting did not confer on "concrete action" to support the chemical stockpile's destruction.

Speaking separately at the end of the two-day NATO Defense Ministerial, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said "it may well be that NATO will be asked for some assistance."

No plans are in place for "U.S. forces" to support the disarmament operation in any manner, he added at a press conference.

Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford was conferring on Wednesday with Syrian rebel forces "on the ground," State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said in a news briefing.

International efforts to convene a peace meeting in Geneva appeared to encounter an roadblock on Tuesday, when Syria's primary Western-backed opposition group this week ruled out participating in any peace meeting that does not seek Assad's removal from power. Earlier
this week, the Syrian president indicated he was intent on staying in office.

"We’re going to keep increasing our assistance and our aid to the folks on the ground and hopefully get everybody eventually to a Geneva 2 conference," Harf said. "Changing the balance of power on the ground is ... a means, not an end."