**R E P O R T**

**ON THE TOPIC:**

***«Arab League voted to reinstate Syria’s membership after 12-year suspension»***

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Arab government representatives in Cairo voted on May 7th to return Syria to the Arab League after a 12-year suspension.

Syria`s membership in the Arab League was suspended 12 years ago early on in the uprising-turned-conflict, which has killed nearly a half million people since March 2011 and displaced half of the country`s pre-war population of 23 million.

All 13 of the 22 member states that attended the session endorsed the decision. The Arab League generally tries to reach agreements by consensus but sometimes opts for simple majorities.

There is still no Arab consensus on normalization with Damascus. Several governments did not attend the meeting. Among the most notable absentees was Qatar, which continues to back opposition groups against Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government, and continues to resist normalization with Damascus.

The decision for Syria to return also includes a commitment to ongoing dialogue with Arab governments to gradually reach a political solution to the conflict, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. The Arab League in the decision also set up a communications committee consisting of Saudi Arabia and Syria`s neighbors Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq to follow up on developments.

In addition to commitments to a gradual resolution to the conflict, the decision also welcomed the Syrian government`s willingness to cooperate with Arab countries to resolve “humanitarian, security, and political” crises that affected Syria and the region due to the conflict-namely refugees, “the threat of terrorism and drug smuggling.”

Many anticipated Syria`s imminent return to the organization. The Arab rapprochement with Damascus accelerated after a deadly earthquake on February 6 that shattered parts of the war-torn country, most notably from Saudi Arabia, which once backed opposition groups trying to overthrow Assad.

Before the meeting, Egyptian Foreign Minister Samer Shoukry said that only an Arab-led “political solution without foreign dictates” can end the ongoing conflict, restoring Syria’s unity and stability and allowing refugees and the internally displaced to return.

“The different stages of the Syrian crisis proved that it has no military solution, and that there is no victor nor defeated in this conflict”, he added.

As Assad regained control of most of the country with the help of key allies Russia and Iran in recent years, some of Syria’s neighbors that hosted large refugee populations took steps towards reestablishing diplomatic ties with Damascus. Meanwhile, Gulf monarchies the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain reestablished ties.

The February 6 earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria was a catalyst for further normalization across the Arab world, including regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran reestablishing ties in Beijing, which had backed opposing sides in the conflict.

Jordan last week hosted regional talks that included envoys from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt and Syria. They agreed on a framework, dubbed the “Jordanian initiative”, that would slowly bring Damascus back into the Arab fold. Amman’s top diplomat said the meeting was the “beginning of an Arab-led political path” for a solution to the crisis.

The conflict in Sudan is also on the agenda, as Arab governments try to stabilize a shaky ceasefire in the ongoing fighting that has killed hundreds of people over the past few weeks.