

Abbas postpones Syria visit

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Syria has postponed a visit to Damascus by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas due to begin on Tuesday, a Palestinian official told AFP

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the postponement came because of a "surprise" visit to Damascus by Saudi King Abdullah.

A report on Al-Jazeera television had earlier said Damascus postponed Abbas's trip in protest over the Palestinian delegation to the UN Human Rights Council dropping its support for an immediate vote on a damning report on the Gaza war.

But the official insisted the claim by the pan-Arab channel was not true. Abbas had been due to arrive in Damascus on Tuesday and hold talks with President Bashar al-Assad.

Abbas has faced a growing wave of criticism both at home and abroad over the decision not to support a vote on the Gaza report, which was widely seen as a result of intense pressure from the US and Israel.

The UN report on Gaza, authored by respected South African Judge Richard Goldstone, accused both Israel and Hamas of war crimes and recommended that the Human Rights Council pass the findings to the UN Security Council and the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court at The Hague.

On Friday, the 47-member council in Geneva decided to postpone until March 2010 a vote on the report, following a request by Pakistan on behalf of Arab, African, Non-Aligned and Muslim states that supported the report.

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