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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AT THE SEVENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 3**

Mr Chairman,

The Russian delegation listened attentively to the statement by the Director-General. We were pleased to receive the information on the continuing cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations in the conduct of the investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria.

This investigation, as you know, was initiated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations following a request from the Government of Syria. Unfortunately, the group formed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, under the leadership of Mr Åke Sellström, has not yet been able to depart for Syria to conduct activity to establish the facts. Russia has repeatedly expressed its concern in relation to the fact that political manoeuvres are preventing the United Nations mission from departing for Syria without delay. Nevertheless, reports have recently emerged that there is an opportunity for certain progress in this matter. In particular, the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms A. Kane, and Mr Sellström last week accepted an invitation from the Government of Syria to travel to Damascus to discuss matters relating to the conduct of the investigation.

In light of the delay of the arrival of the United Nations mission in Syria, Russian specialists, at the request of the Government of Syria, have carried out expert analysis of samples taken at the site of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal, Aleppo province. On 9 July, Russia submitted a detailed report prepared by our specialists to the United Nations Secretariat. It should be noted that special attention was paid when collecting and transporting the samples to ensure the chain of custody. The Russian report represents and substantive contribution to the investigation led by the United Nations. We hope that it will help the United Nations to establish all the facts surrounding the use of chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal, and that it will enable the investigation to be completed within the shortest possible timeframe.

In any case, the United Nations investigation team must be given the opportunity to complete its work. There is no doubt in our minds that the key point here is to be guided by the principle “to do no harm”. I do not believe that anyone at the OPCW would want the Organisation to find itself in the same dubious situation as the United Nations found itself in a few years ago, when a representative of one of the States here present initially exhibited



certain “evidence” of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in a Middle Eastern State, and later this “evidence” proved to be null and void, if not falsified.

And one more thing: a number of delegations have spoken extensively in their statements on the subject of what the mandate of the United Nations investigation should be. Do they seriously believe that the OPCW or even individual delegations have the relevant experience, knowledge, not to mention expertise, to make far-reaching conclusions on these subjects, which in no way pertain to the OPCW’s competence. Moreover, one of these delegations, and I should like to quote this statement, suggested that “the OPCW must remind Syria of its international obligations in the sphere of chemical weapons.” It is obvious that such exhortations fall beyond the remit of the Convention, given that Syria, as a State not Party, has no obligations under this Convention. The OPCW, in turn, is not a body that has responsibility for other international treaties.

The Russian delegation is ready to take note of the opening statement by the Director-General to the Seventy-Third Session of the Executive Council. We consider that the inclusion of any other language in relation to Syria in the report of this Session would be inappropriate, as we are convinced that they would not be of consensual nature and would only complicate the work of the Executive Council.

The Russian delegation requests that this statement be distributed as an official document of the Seventy-Third Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW.

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