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**SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BASSAM SABBAGH  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO  
THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Excellency Ambassador Agustín Vázquez Gómez, Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the OPCW, on your election as Chairperson of the Executive Council for the coming period. We are confident that your diplomatic experience will contribute to the successful steering of the work of the Council. We assure you of our full cooperation to this effect. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to your predecessor, Ambassador Andrea Perugini, Permanent Representative of Italy, for the high level of professionalism and wisdom he has demonstrated during his chairmanship of the Council in the previous period.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by H.E. Ambassador Fikrat Akhundov, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the OPCW, on behalf of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China.

Syria has repeatedly condemned the use of chemical weapons anywhere and under any circumstances. It has consistently warned against the serious risks of increasing possession of toxic chemicals and their use as a weapon by terrorist groups operating under different denominations. In this regard, Syria expresses its deep concern about the deliberate disregard for the important information it consistently provides to the OPCW and the relevant United Nations bodies on terrorist organisations present in Northern Syria involved in the transport, possession, production, and use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals and in staging false-flag chemical attacks to blame them on the Syrian Arab Army and distort its achievements in fighting terrorism.

The Syrian Arab Republic has continuously engaged in constructive cooperation with the Technical Secretariat to resolve the outstanding issues in the initial declaration. On June 16, the Vice-Minister and Head of the National Authority addressed a letter to the Director-General indicating that the Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the twenty-third round of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team, which has been postponed by the Technical Secretariat to a subsequent date following the suspension of OPCW missions in line with the travel restriction measures due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its seventy-eighth monthly report, Syria clearly and expressly indicated that the National Authority experts were looking into the content of the Director-General's letter, dated 21 April 2020. In this respect, the delegation of



the Syrian Arab Republic affirms that it is handling this dossier with utmost seriousness and commitment. The delegation is looking forward to the twenty-third round of consultations and to the closing of all outstanding issues in the Syrian declaration, particularly those that have been thoroughly considered and discussed during the previous rounds of consultations. The delegation regrets that the Director-General made no mention of the Syrian position in his eightieth monthly report. As a result, this issue was addressed in a negative way by the United Nations High Commissioner for Disarmament Affairs during the Security Council briefing on the implementation of its resolution 2118, held in New York, on 2 June 2020.

About two years have elapsed since the Syrian Arab Republic requested the Technical Secretariat that the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) immediately investigate the terrorist attack incident on residential areas in Aleppo on 24 November 2018, in which toxic chemicals were used. Regrettably, the FFM has not issued to date its report on the incident. To this end, both the Syrian and Russian delegations to the OPCW carried out, on 25 May 2020, extensive consultations with the head and members of the FFM in order to present the necessary clarifications on samples and material evidence related to this incident, which were jointly collected by Russian and Syrian experts and provided by the Syrian National Authority to the FFM, requesting it to issue, as soon as possible, its long overdue final report on the incident. In this regard, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its request to expediently issue the reports on incidents reported by it in 2017 and 2018 on the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups in two incidents in Khirbat Al-Masasinah in Dar'a, Qalib Al-Thawr in Al-Salamiya, Yarmouk in Damascus, and Al-Balil in Hama.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic expresses its deep concerns about the working methods of the FFM, which would hastily carry out investigations and issue reports when an allegation is made against the Syrian Government but shows reluctance and drags its feet when a request is made by the Syrian Government to investigate an incident involving the use of toxic chemicals by terrorists.

With regard to the implementation of paragraph 10 of the Executive Council decision EC-83/DEC.5 of 2016, the Syrian Arab Republic informed the Technical Secretariat, on 15 June 2020, that it had requested from the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Syria information on the basis on which the Office of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Damascus relied in its assessment of the security situation in the areas where the two airbases of Hama and Latakia are located. The decision of the Technical Secretariat to visit the two airbases was motivated by this assessment. In his response to the Syrian request, the Resident Coordinator in Damascus noted that “the Senior Security Advisor of the Office assessed the risks involved in this mission and routinely presented them to the Organisation”, noting in the assessment that “consultations by the Senior Security Advisor with the Syrian Government relevant bodies constitute the critical element in assessing security risks. This task should be carried out with the consent of the host government and in its presence”. As such consultation never took place and the competent Syrian bodies were not asked about their own assessment of security risks in these two regions, the Syrian National Authority requested clarification from the Technical Secretariat on the issue as it was deemed to be indicative of a kind of manipulation and falsification of facts, during the coordination process between the Technical Secretariat and the UNDSS Office in Damascus, in what the Technical Secretariat described as a “positive assessment” in order to carry out the visit.

While being committed to the implementation of all Executive Council decisions, the Syrian Arab Republic is also keen on ensuring the safety and security of the members of OPCW missions, as well as other United Nations teams and missions in Syria. In this regard, it affirms that the security situation in the suburbs of Hama, Idlib, and Latakia is still highly dangerous because of the daily attacks launched by terrorist groups, using various means. The Syrian Arab Republic affirms that the competent Syrian authorities are in the best position to know and assess the daily changing security situation in those regions. It therefore underlines the need for the Technical Secretariat to consult with them on sending any of its teams.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms the wrong conclusions of the report of the so called “Investigation and Identification Team” which lacks legitimacy. These conclusions were designed to falsify facts and accuse the Syrian Government of using toxic substances in 2017 in the town of Ltamenah, relying on sources prepared and fabricated by the Al-Nusra Front terrorists, with the support of its arm, the White Helmets Group, in utter disregard of the OPCW working methods and procedures and in blatant breach of the most basic rules of fair investigation.

Syria considers the conclusions of this report to be another scandal for the Organisation, in addition to the one provoked by its report on the Douma incident in 2018. It regrets the transformation of the Organisation into a platform for settling political scores and a tool for the implementation of the hostile plans of the United States of America and its allies against Syria.

Syria affirms that the conclusions reached by this team are totally untrustworthy. They prove beyond any doubt the validity of the reasons that led Syria and a number of other States to reject the team and the decision which established it, considering it to be a tool to politicise the work of this Organisation and turn it into a platform that serves the goals of certain States.

Syria, once again, denies categorically having used any toxic chemicals in the town of Ltamenah or in any other Syrian city or village and affirms that the Syrian Army Forces do not possess such weapons and have never used them.

Syria underlines that the establishment of the “Investigation and Identification Team” was a result of several unsuccessful attempts by the United States of America and its Western allies to exploit the reports of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), whose mandate had already been revoked for lack of professionalism and unreliability of its reports. This prompted those States to manipulate the provisions and procedures of the Chemical Weapons Convention to request a vote on a draft decision to establish this team during a Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties held in June 2018. The draft decision was endorsed by less than half of the States Parties to the Convention.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, together with a number of other Member States, exposed, during the Ninety-Third Session of the Executive Council, the moves made prior to the issuance of the team’s report by the United States of America in the capitals of some Executive Council Member States to promote the report and bring pressure to bear on such States to approve it; leveraging their support for its intended submission to the Council in order to adopt the conclusions of the work of the team. In this respect, the delegation of my country calls on States Parties to reject these invented allegations contained in the conclusions of the report. It warns against the risks of misusing the work of this technical Organisation to justify the hostile policies of the United States of America and its allies against Syria.

With regard to the report on the investigation into potential breaches of confidentiality (S/1839/2020, dated 6 February 2020) ordered by the Director-General following the leaks related to the alleged incident in Douma in April 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted, on 16 April 2020, a number of questions about the content of the report to which the Technical Secretariat responded on 19 June 2020. In this connection, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic notes that the response of the Technical Secretariat was superficial and unsatisfactory. It did not cover all the questions but answered only three of them. This demonstrates the state of evasiveness to which the Technical Secretariat resorted at the time in order to avoid a general and comprehensive discussion of the report.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses the importance of promoting international cooperation in the interest of all States Parties, particularly in the full and non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI of the Convention through the transfer of technology, materials, and equipment for peaceful purposes in chemistry and the removal of any discriminatory measures, such as the unilateral sanctions imposed by certain States Parties on others in contradiction with the spirit and letter of the Convention and in violation of international law. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic compounded the impact of such sanctions.

In conclusion, the delegation of my country would like to affirm the commitment of the Syrian Arab Republic to implementing all its obligations under the Convention and to cooperating with the Technical Secretariat and the Director-General. This, however, must take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and adherence to the standards of integrity and impartiality, without submitting to the pressure and politicisation approach adopted by certain States that are well known to all in order to influence the work of the Organisation and use it for their political interests.

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council and posted on the public website of the Organisation.

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