



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Fifth Session
20 – 22 April 2021 (Part II)

C-25/NAT.111
20 April 2021
ENGLISH only

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES UNDER AGENDA ITEM 9(D)

Mr Chairperson,

In July 2020 the Executive Council considered the findings of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT's report found that the Syrian Arab Republic had used chemical weapons on three separate occasions in Ltamenah in March 2017. The Council condemned the use of chemical weapons and set out clearly what the Syrian Arab Republic needed to do in order to come into compliance. The Syrian Government has failed to respond.

The Executive Council also recommended that the Conference take action, in line with Article XII of the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention"). That is the task before us today.

The Syrian Arab Republic is required to cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat, including under the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118—but has not done so.

The Syrian Arab Republic's 2014 chemical weapons declaration was only a partial disclosure. The declaration has been amended 17 times, in response to incontrovertible evidence presented by OPCW inspectors. The omissions were not mere oversights. To date they have included one chemical weapons production facility, four laboratories, five previously undeclared chemical warfare agents, hundreds of tonnes of chemicals, and thousands of munitions.

Since providing its initial declaration the Syrian regime has gone on to use chlorine and sarin as chemical weapons. In Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017 an aerial bomb filled with sarin was dropped from a Syrian Su-22 aircraft. At least 90 people were killed, including 30 children.

Sarin attacks by the Syrian Arab Air Force were also carried out in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017. Detailed chemical analysis, shared with us all by the IIT, shows that the sarin used had unique identifiers matching information provided by the Syrian Arab Republic in their declaration.

The draft decision before us today is a proportionate response to the Syrian regime's repeated breaches of the Convention. By adopting this decision, the Conference will be acting to strengthen the integrity of the Convention and incentivise the Syrian Arabic Republic to complying with its legal obligations.



The draft decision is clear that as soon as the Syrian Arab Republic complies with the measures laid out by the Executive Council Syria's rights and privileges will be reinstated.

We have heard that Syria needs more time. But how long? We are now in the eighth year since Syria's accession to the Convention. The Declaration Assessment Team has confirmed that 19 issues remain outstanding in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration.

We have also heard that the IIT reports cannot be trusted. In each of its investigations the IIT has been meticulous in setting out the methodologies used; the alternative explanations which were considered and discounted for lack of evidence; and the standard of proof that was applied. In every case the IIT has started from first principles.

The IT's latest report, released on 12 April 2021, has found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Republic carried out another chlorine attack, this time in Saraqib in February 2018. Specialist international investigations have now confirmed eight separate cases of Syrian regime use of chemical weapons.

The Syrian Arab Republic continues to deny ever using chemical weapons and to blame staged or fake attacks, as well as terrorist use. The Syrian regime has made almost two hundred allegations of imminent terrorist attacks but, as confirmed by the Technical Secretariat in March, presented no evidence to support these claims. It is for the Syrian Arab Republic to take the necessary steps to resolve the outstanding issues with its declaration and to meet the full range of commitments under the Convention.

This Conference must decide how to respond to the fact of the Syrian Arab Republic's failure to meet its obligations under the Convention. The draft decision before us is a measured response. It enables the Conference to uphold the provisions of the Convention and the integrity of the OPCW, on whom we all depend for our collective security. The weight of evidence simply cannot be ignored, and we must ensure that those responsible bear the cost of their actions.

Thank you.