

Agenda 9d – Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use

Syria

Thank you Mr Chair

The United Kingdom was one of those that co-sponsored the joint statement just delivered by the Ambassador of Estonia on behalf of 56 States Parties. The last time States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention gathered, in April this year, we sent a very clear message to the Syrian Arab Republic. The Conference emphasised that Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons was unacceptable and a violation of its international obligations. Syria also heard that there was a way forward, a way to come into compliance with its treaty obligations, should its authorities choose to take that path.

Unfortunately, now more than six months on from that unprecedented Conference decision, it appears that Syria has no intention of coming into compliance. Rather we have seen an explicit repudiation of efforts by the Technical Secretariat to support Syria in declaring and destroying its retained chemical weapons capabilities. Failing to issue visas and ignoring correspondence from the Technical Secretariat exposes Syria's lack of cooperation for all to see. This is an affront to Syria's treaty obligations as well as Resolution 2118 adopted by the United Nations Security Council.

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that little progress has been made in addressing outstanding concerns with Syria's initial Declaration. What is more lamentable is that new problems have arisen. In September 2020 Syria was informed by the Secretariat that evidence had been found of nerve agent production at one of its inspected sites. Syria had never previously declared any nerve agent production at this

site and, even more worryingly, the samples were collected from large-volume storage containers. Syria has yet to respond.

In July Syria asserted that two cylinders, relevant to the Douma chemical weapons attack on 7 April 2018, had been destroyed. No evidence has been produced to back up these claims. No explanation has been provided as to why the cylinders were over 60 km from where they were required to be securely stored. Any interference with evidence relevant to on-going investigations of chemical weapons use is deeply concerning. The Secretariat has repeatedly sought an explanation from the Syrian authorities. Syria has yet to respond.

The Syrian regime has a choice to make. A pathway into compliance, with all rights and privileges restored is open to them, if they choose to take it. For now it seems that is not their intention and perhaps it never was.

Mr Chair, on a more positive note the United Kingdom would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their continued efforts on behalf of all States Parties to understand and resolve all issues related to Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Thank you Mr Chair