



## **Briefing to the Members of the United Nations Security Council on the 3rd report of the IIT**

Statement by the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Fernando Arias

7 February 2023

Madam President,  
Distinguished members of the Security Council,  
Madam Under-Secretary General, High-Representative for Disarmament,

On behalf of the OPCW, I would like to begin by conveying my deepest condolences to the representatives of Turkiye and Syria over the deadly earthquake that struck both countries yesterday.

In this period of grief, our thoughts and prayers are with those who lost their loved ones, and we wish those injured during the disaster a speedy recovery despite the difficult circumstances.

Madam President,

I thank you for inviting me today to brief you, together with Ambassador Oñate, Head of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

It is the fifth time in less than 5 years that I am provided with the opportunity to brief the Security Council.

This demonstrates the interest of the Council on matters of common interest.

Each month, the Security Council meets, pursuant to Resolution 2118(2013), to address the Syrian chemical weapons dossier and is briefed by Under-Secretary General Nakamitsu.

Each time, the Council is supported in this task by the OPCW, through the monthly note we send you.

Additionally, Under-Secretary General Nakamitsu and me have periodic conversations that update her with the latest information.

Today, we will brief the members of the Security Council on the 3rd report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on the chemical weapons attack that took place in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018.

On Friday 27 January, the report was shared in The Hague with the 193 Member States of the OPCW and with the United Nations Secretary-General, as mandated by the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) in its decision of 27 June 2018.

Later, the report was also published on the OPCW official website.

I believe all of you have had already the possibility to read the findings of the report.

The versions in all official languages are being processed as we speak.

This task will take time.

You will recall that, on 27 June 2018, the Conference of the States Parties decided to mandate the Secretariat to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In accordance with this decision, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) was established.

The IIT began its work in June 2019, and subsequently issued two reports separately on 8 April 2020 and 12 April 2021, about four different cases.

This is thus the third report issued by the IIT.

The report sets out the findings of the investigation that took place over a period of two years, from January 2021 to December 2022.

It elaborates on the conclusions reached by the OPCW Secretariat's FFM, that determined in its report, published on 1 March 2019, that highly concentrated chlorine gas had been used in Douma on 7 April 2018.

Beyond the work of the FFM, the IIT led its own independent investigations.

It reviewed a wide range of information, part of it received, part of it directly collected.

On the basis of the analysis and studies carried out, the IIT concluded, that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, between 19:10 and 19:40, local time, on the 7th of April 2018, at least one helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Dumayr airbase and operating under the control of the Tiger Forces, dropped two yellow cylinders, which hit two residential buildings, in a civilian populated area, killing 43 named individuals, and affecting dozens more.

Several contradictory scenarios were studied and put against the evidence collected and analysed.

Such evidence not only validated and corroborated the conclusions reached.

It also discarded all other scenarios.

The work of the IIT confirmed, that highly concentrated chlorine gas, coming from one of the two cylinders, killed 43 persons in one of the buildings.

Some individuals who were in the building, had sought refuge in the basement, thinking that there, they would be better protected, during the conventional air strike, that at this time was taking place.

Some others, aware that the chemical used would be heavier than air, and sink towards the lower part of the building, tried to reach the upper floors.

Both, the basement where chlorine gas expanded, because it is 2.5 times heavier than air, and the upper floors of the building, where the cylinder was releasing chlorine gas in high concentration, were lethal places to stay.

The work of the IIT also proves that the attack could not be staged with the cylinders being placed manually, and even less in the midst of the airstrikes, that were taking place at the same time.

It finally proves that the craters found at the top of the buildings, could not be caused by dropping the cylinders from the adjacent buildings, because the highest one is hardly 16-meters higher, than those on which the cylinders fell.

This difference in height, is not enough, for the cylinders reaching the necessary speed for producing the damage that was found at the top of the buildings.

The IIT found, that on the basis of all the information analysed, there are reasonable grounds to believe, that at least one helicopter was used, and that this helicopter was operated by the Tiger Forces, an elite unit of the Syrian Governmental Armed Forces.

Details of the report will be presented by Ambassador Santiago Oñate, the Coordinator of the IIT, following my statement.

It has been about 12 years, that the Syrian people have suffered from war.

Amongst the atrocities of the war, the grim record of this conflict, includes chemical weapons use.

Chemical weapons have been used in the Syrian Arab Republic both, before and after its accession, to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in September 2013.

These well-documented, and repeated uses have taken place despite the successful destruction of over 1300 tonnes, of declared Syrian stockpiles, under stringent OPCW verification measures.

All 193 States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention solemnly, and voluntarily agreed and committed, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.

This taboo has been upheld through international reactions against the use of chemical weapons at different levels, in different organisations, entities, and fora.

The accountability for the use of chemical weapons, has been requested, on many occasions at the highest level.

The United Nations Security Council has been repeatedly calling, that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable.

The Security Council resolutions 2118(2013), 2209(2015), and 2235(2015) all contain this strong message.

The United Nations Secretary General also supported this call in his statements, by underlining, that accountability is an essential part of deterrence against the use of chemical weapons.

The United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council have both echoed, the call for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, to be held accountable.

Several international entities were created to address the alleged crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, as part of the accountability framework.

In August 2011, the UN Human Rights Council created the Independent International Commission of Inquiry.

Its purpose is to investigate alleged violation of international human rights, in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 – the so-called “Pinheiro Commission”.

In December 2016, the international, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) was established by the General Assembly to assist in the investigation of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, since March 2011.

The United Nations General Assembly has addressed chemical weapons through its annually adopted resolution, on the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, presented by Poland.

This resolution expresses the strong conviction, that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable.

It has also stressed, the importance of the implementation of the 27 June 2018 decision (C-SS-4/Dec.3) of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties, that mandated the Secretariat of this organisation, to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic, resulting in the creation of the IIT.

The Conference, and the Executive Council of the OPCW, have also stated, in a number of decisions that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

In addition to all abovementioned, countless national statements were delivered over the past years at the OPCW, the United Nations, and in other international fora, expressing that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable.

There is one common principle, underlying these reactions, a principle that has never been contested by any State Party:

The absolute prohibition of chemical weapons use, and the unanimous and repeated condemnation of any use, by anyone, under any circumstances.

And the strong conviction that those perpetrators must be identified and held accountable.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

I wish to recall that every report produced by the Secretariat of the OPCW, including that of the IIT, follows the highest standards, and best practices, used by international investigative bodies, for reaching solid conclusions.

This standard consists in using comprehensive combination, consistency, and corroboration of all the information, and evidence collected as a whole.

The IIT conclusions, were based on an overall assessment, and a thorough analysis, of all diverse, and numerous pieces of evidence, received and collected.

It is the corroboration of all these elements victim and witness testimonies, medical records, sample collection and numerous analyses and studies of chemistry, ballistic, military elements, forensics expertise, computer modelling, satellite imagery, remnants of munitions, authenticated videos and photographs, to name a few, which, taken together, allowed the IIT to reach its conclusions.

I should recall that corroborating consists in gathering as much information as possible, analysing all elements, compare them against one another, and against all scenarios and arrive at an incontestable conclusion.

All views were considered and put against the facts.

Many relevant units of the Secretariat have provided valuable support to the team, in the course of its activities.

This support was provided, with strict respect for the independence of the investigative work of the team, and on a clear need-to-know basis.

I can guarantee, that the investigations were performed under the sole authority of the IIT Coordinator, and that the substantive results were completely respected.

It is worth mentioning, that the IIT has attached the utmost importance to the quality of the work, despite the difficult conditions which have included:

- numerous and sophisticated cyber-attacks;
- the massive spread of disinformation about our work, and sometimes even disrespect to some staff members; and,
- the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The work of the OPCW regarding the Syrian chemical weapons files, has presented many challenges for the Secretariat.

Lessons have been learnt and continue to be learnt.

Just like with other missions of the Secretariat in Syria, be it the Declaration Assessment Team or the Fact-Finding Mission, the Secretariat will continue to ensure, that the knowledge, skills, and expertise acquired, remain, and are embedded in all relevant units.

The construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology of the OPCW has just been achieved.

The Secretariat will use all the new capabilities of the Centre to ensure knowledge, capacity, skills are kept and developed in the Organisation, for a better implementation of the Convention.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,

Before I conclude, I wish to recall a few essential points.

The IIT is part of the Secretariat of the OPCW, and it is not a judicial body, such as a court or a tribunal.

The IIT has not the authority to assign individual criminal responsibility.

Its mandate, provided by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties, is to establish the facts and identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons.

Through its work, however, the OPCW provides the international community, with materials, and evidence, that will assist accountability mechanisms, in their tasks.

The States Parties, at the United Nations and at the OPCW, have to decide on the next steps.

Since the day I took office as Director-General in July 2018, I have been making every effort to engage the Syrian Arab Republic to find ways to address, and resolve, different issues, related to its chemical weapons dossier.

In relation to the mandate to identify the perpetrators, despite my several attempts to engage with them, the Syrian authorities have refused to recognise, and to engage, with the IIT.

It should be recalled that all the mandates given through the Convention, and decisions of the OPCW Policy Making Organs concerning the Syrian chemical dossier, remain binding on all States Parties, as well as on the Secretariat.

The report is now in your hands, and it will be up to the United Nations, to the OPCW, and in general to the international community, to take any further action you deem necessary.

Thank you very much and now the Head of the IIT, Ambassador Santiago Oñate will take the floor.

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