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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MILAD ATIEH PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW AT THE
FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,

Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate H.E. Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast, the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the OPCW, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Fifth Review Conference.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China, delivered in this meeting by the Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

My country's delegation regrets that this technical organisation is once again dragged into geopolitical and security issues of a regional and international nature and is deflected away from the goals for which it was established. This Organisation has been turned by the United States of America and some Western States into a platform for levelling false accusations against Russia of using or preparing for the use of chemical weapons, as they did with Syria over the past nine years. This is not an accusation but is confirmed and corroborated by the statements delivered by those States at the Fifth Review Conference, which we have before us. In this context, Syria supports Russia's right to defend itself and protect its national security in response to aggressive Western policies. Syria's position in support of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine has been and will always remain based on firm political, moral, and legal considerations and principles. This Russian special military operation is in no way related to the proceedings of our present conference.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses that the main goal of the Review Conference, as stipulated in Article VIII, paragraph 22, of the Convention, is to review the operation of the Convention, i.e., to achieve the object and purpose of the Convention, address the shortcomings or imperfections over the past five years, correct mistakes, if any, and remove obstacles standing in the way of full, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation. This is an absolute obligation on all States Parties. Therefore, the Conference is a great opportunity for States Parties to review the work and decisions of the Organisation, to shoulder their responsibilities and to choose between the Organisation's failure to achieve its goals and the success of an international multilateral regime for preventing the re-emergence and proliferation of one of the most dangerous weapons of mass destruction. The Organisation cannot bear failure or politicisation and all States Parties must realise the danger of what some Western States are doing to undermine its work. In this context, Syria affirms that any attempt by the United States of America and its



allies to turn this Conference into a new platform for achieving political ends that serve their agendas is a violation of the Convention and an attempt to deflect this Organisation from its mandate and the goals for which it was established.

It has been almost 10 years since Syria made its sovereign decision to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, making every effort and working in full seriousness, credibility, and transparency to implement all its obligations as a result of this accession, despite the strict time frames imposed on it by the OPCW and the extremely difficult circumstances that Syria was going through at the time. Yet, Syria has implemented all that was required of it and has cooperated fully with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and its teams, as recognised by the OPCW and its Director-General. At the same time, Syria has always affirmed its categorical rejection of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances. Unfortunately, this Syrian cooperation and commitment is nowhere to be seen in the statements and reports by the OPCW Technical Secretariat and Director-General¹.

Since 2018, the OPCW has entered a new phase of politicisation and polarisation that is unprecedented since the entry into force of the Convention in 1997. Some Western States have politicised the work of the Organisation and are using it as a tool to achieve their geopolitical goals. The Syrian chemical dossier and the attempts to draw the Russian Federation into the game of chemical weapons use are a stark example of how the OPCW is being turned from a technical organisation with lofty goals to a tool that is led by the United States and its allies and that is moving away from professionalism and the purposes for which it was established. The OPCW is currently in a state of unprecedented division that threatens its future.

After the “Joint Investigative Mechanism” failed to fulfil its mandate under the Convention and its establishing decision, and after it was established beyond any doubt that the Mechanism was unprofessional through its reports issued after alleged incidents, Western States held the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties in June 2018, which resulted in the adoption of a decision that violates the provisions of the Convention and the establishment of an illegitimate team called “the Investigation and Identification Team” (IIT). The IIT was granted a mandate that is not provided for in the Convention in a flagrant and obvious manner. The fabricated and fake reports of this team formed the basis of unjust and politicised decisions that deprived Syria of some of its rights and privileges at the OPCW in an unprecedented manner. Unfortunately, the team’s misleading and fabricated reports receive blind praise and support from numerous States Parties. More dangerous still, Western States try in their statements and in the draft final document that they submitted to give legitimacy to this team and its reports in this Conference. Those States have established the so-called “Investigation and Identification Team” illegally within the OPCW. This team was designed as a tool to fabricate accusations of chemical weapons use against the Syrian Government and later against others, in order to justify Western aggression against it, as was the case in 2017 and 2018 by three permanent Member States of the Security Council. Therefore, Syria and a number of other States have considered this team illegitimate and will not recognise any of its outputs. The Syrian Arab Republic considers the “Investigation and Identification Team” illegitimate because it was given a mandate that violates the provisions of the Convention. It sets a dangerous precedent of a technical organisation being mandated with matters that fall within

¹ The Report by the Technical Secretariat issued by document EC-81/DG.5, dated 25 January 2016, stating that all chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic and removed from its territories in 2014 have been destroyed. Also, the Technical Secretariat has verified the destruction of all of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic (EC-89/DG.1, dated 24 July 2018).

the powers and prerogatives of the Security Council. Therefore, Syria, along with other States, does not recognise the legitimacy of this team and its work and refuses to fund it and to grant it access to the classified information provided by the Syrian Government to the OPCW and the Security Council. Therefore, Syria refuses any and all of its current and future outputs. Syria requests all States Parties in the Fifth Review Conference to correct this violation of the provisions of the Convention in order to preserve the Convention and the future of the OPCW.

As for the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), it has failed to meet its obligations under the Convention and the Terms of Reference agreed with Syria. It has been proven that the FFM was lacking professionalism and integrity through its reports, particularly the report on the Alleged Douma incident in 2018. This report was subject of serious leaks that confirm its lack of credibility and the sheer scale of falsification in it. Some States Parties, by exerting pressure on the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat, prevented any professional, technical, and constructive dialogue on FFM reports in order to hide the fake and misleading nature of the findings contained in those reports, and also because those findings serve their hostile political agendas against Syria. Those States and the Technical Secretariat have disregarded the fact that Syria and numerous States have stressed the need for the OPCW to have investigation teams, provided that the latter are unbiased and fair, that they operate with professionalism without any politicisation, and that they do not turn into a political tool to achieve the goals of States that are known for having hostile positions against Syria since 2013. The reality, however, is the complete opposite. Yet, Syria has fully cooperated with the FFM and has recently met all requests made by the FFM, although the incidents that the FFM requested to investigate took place more than seven years ago. In this context, the Syrian Arab Republic affirms that the professionalism and credibility of the FFM are contingent on the correction of the flaws marring its approach and working methods, its compliance with the provisions of the Convention, its abidance by its professional standards and the Terms of Reference agreed upon with Syria, and proving that its future reports will be unbiased, unlike its previous misleading and fabricated reports on the Khan Shaykhun incident (2017), the Aleppo incident (2018), the Saraqib incident (2018), the Douma incident (2018). The government of my country calls on the United States of America and its Western allies to stop exerting pressure on the FFM team and refrain from covering up the crimes of terrorists and their arm, “the White Helmets” group, in that regard.

Syria is still facing unprecedented campaigns of scepticism and false accusations waged by the United States of America and some Western States, with the aim of achieving hostile political goals that they were unable to achieve through a direct and indirect war against my country that is still ongoing. In their national papers submitted to the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference, those States tried to make a false accusation against Syria of failing to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. They imposed this accusation in the draft final document of the Conference. Those States have ignored and even denied Syria’s unprecedented cooperation with the Organisation. The aim of this denial was to draw Syria to another position and place, i.e., to make a reaction and not to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. However, Syria has been acting wisely vis-à-vis this Western position and has continued cooperation with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW, despite this disregard and denial and despite the false accusations of non-cooperation. Syria insists on continuing its cooperation and on ending this dossier as soon as possible.

Concerning the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), this team was established upon Syria’s request to assist it with the preparation and submission of its initial declaration to the Organisation, as Syria lacked sufficient experience in preparing this declaration when it

acceded to the Convention. As time went by, as part of the politicisation of the Syrian chemical dossier, the DAT turned into an investigation team serving political agendas pursued by some States. To date, Syria has held 24 rounds of consultations with the DAT and three meetings with the so-called “reduced team” of the DAT, the latest of which took place from 12 to 19 April 2023. All requested facilities were provided to this team, including meetings, witnesses, site visits and sampling. Western States, however, managed to turn the DAT into an additional tool to accuse Syria of non-compliance and of hiding chemical weapons, pre-empting the possible outcomes of the next rounds of consultations. As the DAT is not an investigation or inspection team, Syria, in exercise of its sovereign right and since it took the initiative to request the establishment of the DAT, requested that one member of the DAT be replaced for sovereign objective reasons. However, the Technical Secretariat and the Director-General responded to the political pressure brought to bear on them by those States. They refused to hold the twenty-fifth round of consultations despite Syria’s request to hold it in order to put an end to the political accusations levelled by Western States against it and to end the dossier of outstanding issues as soon as possible.

Chemical terrorism threats from terrorist groups and non-State actors constitute a serious danger to the security and stability of States Parties. Syria calls on all Member States of the OPCW to step up international efforts to confront this very serious threat. It has become clear that Western States seek to cover up the crimes and practices of terrorist groups in Syria. This wrong approach has encouraged those terrorists to commit more heinous crimes against Syrian citizens and to prepare for new crimes involving the use of toxic substances in order to blame them on the Syrian Government. Syria has consistently kept the OPCW and the Security Council informed of the continued preparations by terrorist groups and the ‘White Helmets’ terrorist group for false-flag chemical attacks, especially in the countryside of the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Latakia. Syria sent hundreds of documented letters in relation to the preparations by terrorists for false-flag chemical attacks, the latest of which was a few days ago. Unfortunately, this important information did not receive any attention from the Technical Secretariat and many Western States.

The approach pursued by Western States undermines the work of the OPCW. Not only did they commit a grave and documented violation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention, but they also contributed to unprecedented divisions within the OPCW, through resorting to voting to impose decisions, without consensus. The Syrian case embodied by the decision of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in 2021 and the decision of the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council in 2020 was one of the most outstanding examples of the way these States deal with the OPCW and how they attempt to politicise it.

Achieving the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention is a very important step in ensuring the establishment of an effective global regime against chemical weapons. However, this will not be achieved without compelling Israel to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention and other international conventions related to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, the Syrian Arab Republic regrets that States that are sponsors of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons are impeding any endeavour to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, in order to protect Israel and keep it outside any international control over its nuclear, chemical, and biological facilities.

The United States and its allies, notably the European Union, continue to flagrantly violate the provisions of Article XI of the Convention, the United Nations Charter, and the principles and rules of international law through continuing their policy of economic terrorism against Syria and other States Parties, namely the unilateral coercive measures. What is dangerous in this regard is that those States claim falsely that they are concerned about human rights in Syria. Not only are they imposing these measures, but they are also waging campaigns of immense pressure on other States dealing with the Syrian State and all its institutions. This has had a negative impact on the life of Syrian citizens and has led to the inability to cater for the most basic needs of Syrian citizens, such as medicines, medical equipment, electricity, oil, food, education supplies, and many other essential needs. This was obvious after the destructive earthquake that hit Syria in February 2023. In this context, Syria calls upon the OPCW and the States Parties to assume their responsibilities and ensure the full, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI of the Convention, and to urge the United States of America and its allies to stop violating and undermining the provisions of the Convention and to lift the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria. Also, Syria calls for international cooperation to confront the illegal restrictions imposed by these countries on the transfer of scientific technology for peaceful purposes to developing countries, with the aim of preventing them from achieving economic development and scientific progress for their peoples, and preventing them from using chemistry for peaceful purposes, in clear violation of the provisions of the Convention and international law.

The Fifth Review Conference is an opportunity for all States Parties that are keen on the Convention and the success of the Organisation to make their choices and identify their priorities over the coming five years in order to correct the errors in the work of the Organisation and the serious violations of the provisions of the Convention, and to refrain from politicising the Organisation and deflecting it from its technical nature and its professionalism and credibility, and to end divisions within it. From this perspective, we call on all States Parties to reject Western States' attempt to politicise this Organisation. We call on them not to follow those States and their destructive approach for the Organisation, its future, and the foundations of the Convention. The serious challenge to the OPCW does not concern Syria alone. It is rather a problem that concerns all States Parties and States working towards peace, security, and global stability.

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Fifth Review Conference and posted on the OPCW's public website and on Catalyst.

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