



OPCW

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A.V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

The delegation of the Russian Federation is again pleased to welcome you as the head of the Executive Council and would like to assure you of its full support and readiness to cooperate constructively to ensure that this session is as successful as possible.

Russia is fully dedicated to fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The completion of operations at four chemical weapons destruction facilities in 2015 marked a significant stage in terms of implementing the Russian national chemical stockpile destruction programme. In keeping with the designated schedule, work at the last operating facility in Kizner continues and will be completed no later than 2020. We intend to address in detail the status of the destruction of the remaining chemical weapons stockpile in the Russian Federation during discussions under the relevant agenda item.

We would also like to remind the Council that on 25–29 April this year, a visit to the Russian Federation by representatives of the Executive Council and the Technical Secretariat will be organised during which a number of meetings will be scheduled with Russian government officials involved in the chemical weapons destruction programme and legislative officials of the Russian Federation. They will also visit the Kizner chemical weapons destruction facility. We hope that this trip will help the OPCW better understand the current status of the chemical weapons destruction programme in our country and the efforts that Russia is taking towards its soonest possible completion.

Regarding the Syrian chemical dossier, we cannot agree with the statements of “serious concern” made today in connection with the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) in Syria under Article III of the Convention. There are, in fact, questions about the completeness and accuracy of this document, and the Technical Secretariat and the Syrian authorities will have to make additional efforts to bring it into line with the requirements of the Convention.

But there are also clearly positive moments, and it would be wrong to fail to acknowledge them. First of all, Damascus is working closely with the DAT—a fact that has been noted multiple times in the monthly reports submitted to the Executive Council by the



Director-General. Second, the joint efforts of the Technical Secretariat's experts and the Syrians will achieve real progress in clarifying the information in a number of episodes of the former Syrian military chemical programme; this also follows from the Director-General's report submitted to this session of the Executive Council. And finally, third, the openness demonstrated by the Syrians—going above and beyond the requirements set out in the Chemical Weapons Convention—is the best evidence of the good will of Damascus when it comes to fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. Of course, it stands to acknowledge the effort that this requires of the Syrian Arab Republic, considering the armed conflict situation in that country.

In this regard, we do not agree with the draft decision submitted by the US delegation to the Executive Council on the matter of the Syrian declaration, as we perceive it to be an attempt to spin what is essentially a technical issue into something political. It is hard to argue with the fact that the OPCW—both in terms of its mandate and the type of activities in which it is engaged—is a technical, not a political, Organisation. Article III of the Convention covers collaboration between the Technical Secretariat and State Parties on matters concerning initial declarations exclusively from that angle.

We believe that the Executive Council, instead of making a judgment of the political plan on this matter—which is exactly what the authors of this draft decision want us to do—should focus on how to resolve this problem, and not on how to drive it into a dead end, making it impossible to move forward. It is important to understand that the excessive and unfounded pressure on Damascus—which is already doing everything required of it on this matter—is destructive.

We firmly believe that it is necessary to give the DAT and the Syrian Arab Republic the opportunity to work calmly on the issues that the Technical Secretariat intends to additionally clarify based on the results of the most recent missions in Syria. Then, clearly, it will be necessary to review the situation as a whole: to understand which questions have been clarified to the extent required by the Convention, which rational and feasible clarification methods have been exhausted, and where there is an opportunity for more progress. We are prepared to voice our observations on this matter under the corresponding agenda item.

Specifically, regarding the Fact-Finding Mission investigating the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria (FFM), we would like to note that everything possible must be done to gather conclusive evidence relating to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, based not on dubious or superficial information or indirect sources of information, but on real facts supported by material evidence and studies conducted by Secretariat experts. In this case, the FFM reports will truly be a crucial source for the Joint Investigative Mission of the OPCW and the United Nations—which has been tasked with identifying the parties guilty of incidents involving the use of chemical weapons—in its investigations in Syria.

Exactly three weeks ago, the Executive Council took an important decision concerning the chemical weapons situation in Libya. We believe that in light of the complex military and political situation in that country, as well as the threat that chemical weapons in Libya could fall into the hands of terrorists, the OPCW must take a decision as soon as possible on providing assistance to Libya in destroying the remaining chemical stockpiles based on the results of a careful examination of this problem from legal, organisational, technical, financial, and other standpoints.

Without anticipating any possible decision on this matter, we would like to again state that if the results of an in-depth examination of this matter leads to a choice in favour of the option to remove chemical weapons from Libya, then the United Nations Security Council cannot remain uninvolved, as the matter at hand is a threat to peace and security. This is not a technical problem, as a number of delegations would have you believe; it is a political and legal problem.

In light of the increasing amount of information on the use of chemical weapons in the Middle East by terrorist groups, we continue to carefully follow the investigation into the relevant incidents by the Government of Iraq. We have noted the new information that was presented here today on the investigation and we welcome the next steps to be taken by the Government of Iraq to investigate all similar cases in that country. We believe that continued close cooperation between Baghdad and the OPCW in line with Article X of the Convention is crucial, as is the continuation of regular reports by the Organisation on similar incidents and response measures.

The threat of chemical terrorism in light of the development of events in Syria, Iraq, and Libya is taking on a new, very worrisome dimension. The problem is becoming increasingly expansive, a transborder problem that requires the careful attention of the international community. One cannot help but express major concern about the fact that ISIS fighters have gained access to chemical weapons production technologies and capabilities.

The Russian Federation believes it is necessary to mobilise the international community to resolve this problem. In this regard, Mr Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, spoke at a Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on 1 March this year about the Russian initiative to develop a convention for the suppression of acts of chemical terrorism. I would like to emphasise that this work is aimed primarily at ensuring the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and does not in any way stipulate its revision.

We expect that if work begins on this convention, the OPCW Secretariat and the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention would contribute to the development of this new and important document.

We assign great importance to the discussion of the Organisation's future priorities. We support the establishment of an open-ended working group to hold discussions and develop recommendations on the future priorities of the Organisation. We believe that during the OPCW's transition period—which can only happen with a consensus—the fundamental principles of the Convention must remain clear, the delicate balance between the rights and responsibilities of the States Parties must be maintained, and any new aspects in the Organisation's activities must remain within the boundaries of its mandate under the Convention. At the same time, the OPCW must retain its status as a leading international organisation ensuring the elimination and preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

We believe that the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, a new auxiliary body of the OPCW established at the Twentieth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, will play an important role in this matter. One of its functions will be to develop expert assessments and recommendations on the future of the Organisation, in addition to defining its priorities in terms of activities and development.

Mr Chairperson,

Today's session is your last regular session as Chairperson of the Executive Council. We would like to take advantage of having the floor to voice our genuine gratitude for the efforts that you have made to ensure the success of the Council and resolve many complex matters on the agenda. We value your tact, finesse, and good humour, all of which have all contributed to the successful work of the Council.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be distributed as an official document and published on the OPCW webpage.

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