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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-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(G)**

Mr Chairperson,

We have noted the report of the Director-General on the status of the investigation by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria.

We cannot help but state that we have some objections to the way the FFM is operating. At the Meeting of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) on 5 July 2017, there was a technical briefing by the heads of the FFM teams on the results of the investigation into the chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun; this briefing revealed that there are serious problems with the FFM’s activities.

The failure of the inspectors to visit the site of the incident means that the conclusions made about the incident are based on circumstantial, rather than direct evidence. A great deal of important evidence was not taken into consideration. I do not wish to repeat myself, since we already addressed all of the details at the meeting on 5 July. All the same, I would like to state the following.

First of all, having not been at the site of the incident, experts did not establish the type of container holding sarin, nor were they able to determine the means of delivery of the toxic substance, which is a major gap in the investigation. We understand that the Mission’s mandate is not to identify the perpetrators of these crimes—that task has been assigned to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. Furthermore, determining the means of delivery and the use of a toxic substance in the incident in Khan Shaykhun is an important technical task that should have been carried out by the FFM. Without this information, the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism in its further investigation of this incident will face huge challenges.

Second, we cannot agree with the statement that the task of the FFM was only to establish the fact that sarin was used. This interpretation contradicts the mandate of the FFM, which clearly states (paragraph 3) that the task of the Mission is not to establish, but rather to “gather facts”; in other words, it is charged with examining all of the circumstances relating to allegations of the use of toxic chemicals—to quote: “gather facts regarding the allegations”—and report the findings to the Director-General. This wording presumes a much broader scope of tasks—which is, by the way, confirmed by all prior OPCW expert activities in Syria.



Finally, the results of the investigation would have been much more complete if the OPCW experts had visited the al-Shayrat airbase, where the sarin used in the Khan Shaykhun attack was allegedly stored. This was something insisted upon not only by us, but also by the Government of Syria, which has extended a guarantee of security to OPCW inspectors.

Some time ago we were told that the FFM is investigating several different incidents related to the alleged use of toxic substances in Syria. Together with the material evidence of the use of mustard gas in the Syrian village of Um-Housh, Russian military servicemen, working jointly with their Syrian colleagues, submitted material evidence to the Technical Secretariat back in December 2016, in addition to evidence related to another episode involving the use of chlorine that took place in the autumn of 2016 in Aleppo's 1070 district. However, the Council has not been informed of any of the results of that investigation to date.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Eighty-Fifth Session of the Council.

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