



OPCW

Executive Council

Thirty-Second Meeting
27 March 2013

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SOUTH AFRICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. PETER GOOSEN
AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA
AT THE THIRTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
WITH REGARD TO THE OFFICIAL REQUEST THAT HAS BEEN MADE BY THE
UNSG TO THE OPCW FOR SUPPORT IN AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SYRIA**

Madame Chairperson,

1. My delegation welcomes you back to the Chair of the Executive Council. We look forward to working closely with you in ensuring that the Council gives substantive consideration to the matter before it.
2. My delegation also thanks the Director-General for the information that he has provided to the Council, and to all States Parties, with regard to the request that has been made to the OPCW by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for its support and cooperation in an investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, and also with regard to the actions that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has undertaken to respond to this request.
3. The South African Government has expressed serious concern at the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict and it has been deeply concerned at the reports that have emanated from Aleppo in Syria about the alleged use of chemical weapons on Tuesday, 19 March 2013, which has reportedly cost the lives of 16 people and resulted in injury to approximately 100 others.
4. Speaking on behalf of the South African Government, our Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Ebrahim Ebrahim, made it clear that:

“The alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria is of serious concern and would introduce an extremely dangerous element into the conflict, which is wholly unacceptable by any standard. No cause could ever justify the use of weapons of mass destruction.

South Africa is gravely concerned about the serious escalation of the conflict in Syria. We have consistently called on all the parties to the conflict to stop the violence as well as protect the rights of the Syrian population.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, South Africa has condemned the abuse of human rights, in particular violations of the rights of vulnerable groups, such



as women and children. Weapons of mass destruction are particularly heinous because they target innocent civilians. All the parties to the current conflict have a responsibility to protect and preserve human rights.

South Africa reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. There is no military solution to the conflict. The only way to stop the further destruction of Syrian society is for the parties to come together in dialogue without delay. Any political transition must reflect the will of the Syrian people. South Africa rejects any calls for forced regime change and outside military interference or any action not in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

South Africa calls for restraint on the part of all parties to the conflict and again emphasizes the need for an immediate political settlement as expressed by the Geneva Joint Communiqué.”

5. As my Deputy Minister stated, there can be no justification for the use of weapons of mass destruction and of chemical weapons, and we would consequently believe that this Executive Council, which serves as one of the primary policy-making organs of the OPCW and which has a particular role to play in cases of the alleged use of chemical weapons, should not only meet to receive information from the Director-General. We would believe that it is also incumbent on this Executive Council to send a clear and strong message to the international community about how seriously it views the current situation, and it is for this reason that South Africa is satisfied with the “Agreed Statement” that is to officially be made today by the Chairperson of the Council.
6. The elements for such a statement that we thought were of particular importance, and which we are now also pleased to see incorporated in the “Agreed Statement” by the Chairperson of the Council, were for the Council to:
 - (a) Express its deep concern at the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria;
 - (b) Underline that the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances would be reprehensible and is completely contrary to the legal norms and standards of the international community;
 - (c) Express its unequivocal support of the investigation that has been initiated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations with the support of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; and
 - (d) Call upon all parties in Syria to extend their full cooperation to the investigation and to ensure that the investigation team is able to complete the investigation safely and effectively.
7. The use of chemical weapons would be the most serious breach of the international norm that has been established by the Chemical Weapons Convention against chemicals weapons and against their use. We had truly believed that the horror caused by the use of chemical weapons was an aberration that had been designated to

the history of humankind's inhumanity. The allegations that have now been made must consequently be treated with the deliberate seriousness that is required.

Madam Chairperson, I thank you.

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