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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE
FORTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madame Chairperson,

We have listened carefully to the statements by the delegations regarding the second report of the Fact-Finding Mission surrounding the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and we would like to reiterate that we have heard absolutely nothing here that would, in the opinion of some delegations, require convening an urgent special meeting of the Executive Council. All of the conclusions could have been voiced with equal success just one week later at the Seventy-Seventh Session.

We express our gratitude to the Technical Secretariat for bringing the Mission's second report to the attention of the Member States of the Executive Council, which was received with gravitas by the Russian Federation and is now being carefully examined.

We have taken note of the Mission's conclusions that beginning in April this year, a toxic substance was "systematically and repeatedly" used as a weapon in several settlements in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic. As stated in the report, the nature of the impact of this toxic substance allows the Mission to, "with a high degree of confidence", draw the conclusion that this substance was either pure chlorine or a chlorine-based compound.

In this regard, we primarily would like to note the following key factors:

- The Russian Federation decisively and unconditionally condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere;
- We find it necessary to have the Mission continue a comprehensive examination of all of the materials relating to the incidents involving the use of chlorine in Syria;
- We also firmly believe that it is premature to draw any conclusions, particularly political conclusions, prior to the completion of the Mission and likewise, prior to the publication of a final report and the discussion thereof by the policy-making organs of the OPCW.

In light of these circumstances, we reiterate that there are no grounds for convening today's Council meeting, particularly as an urgent special meeting.



The Fact-Finding Mission has accomplished a great deal in terms of gathering and examining an extensive collection of materials and evidence. At the same time, we presume that there are other factors at play requiring further meticulous examination and analysis.

First and foremost, this concerns the Mission's usage of witness reports; without casting any doubt on the value of the source, we believe it is important to take a cautious and balanced approach in assessing such evidence. We have heard today requests that the Mission not be restricted to interviewing a limited group of witnesses, but rather maximise the diversification of its sources. We align ourselves with that request.

In particular, we believe it is important to clarify the following: how and by whom were the witnesses selected? How was it established whether a witness was in fact located in the sites allegedly subjected to attacks? Has there been any opportunity for others who wished to do so to submit their own evidence to the FFM (including in writing)? Have any parties been interviewed who were not victims or directly involved in providing aid to victims? Have any representatives from law enforcement agencies or any other Syrian authorities been interviewed?

We are particularly interested in the two NGOs mentioned in the report: why were these exact organisations selected by the Mission to provide assistance? Do these organisations have credible expertise in the field of chemical weapons, and if so, what are their credentials? Who is sponsoring their operations?

One of the elements in the report—the mention of helicopters—was actively exploited today by some delegations as proof of the implication of the Syrian Government in the alleged use of chemical weapons. We believe that some clarity is required in this matter as well. We note that the Mission's report does not present a cause-and-effect connection between the presence of helicopters at the sites of the incidents and the use of chemical weapons. We believe that such conclusions cannot possibly be drawn based on the witness reports provided in the report.

It is with a healthy dose of scepticism that we also receive the fact that the witnesses and their reports consistently link the chemical attacks with the presence of helicopters in the air. In a number of cases, the descriptions of the circumstances of these attacks (especially at night) give rise to doubt regarding the ability to rely seriously on these reports.

We would also like to find out what level of significance is being assigned by the Mission to the bag mentioned in paragraph 14; this bag contained a certain amount of a chemical substance that was allegedly used in one of the attacks. Has this substance been identified? Separately, are there any substantiated grounds allowing us to conclude that it did in fact come from the attack site?

I also noted the conclusion about the 'systematic' nature of the use of the toxic substance. While the term 'repeatedly' is more or less clear, the term 'systematic' requires some clarification. It is not clear exactly what, from a legal point of view, serves as grounds to substantiate this qualification. In a situation in which fact-finding efforts are underway concerning the potential use of chemical weapons within the context of an armed conflict, these terms ought to be used with caution and with compelling justification for such.

As the Mission continues its work, we presume that it will also be necessary to examine information provided by the Syrian Government regarding the seizure of chemical production facilities and suspicious operations involving toxic substances in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries.

As such, we would like to—just as the Brazilian delegation has—draw the Council’s attention to what are now regular reports by media outlets on the repeated use of chemical weapons in northern Iraq by fighters of the “Islamic State”. This situation is even more concerning given that the subject at hand—just like in the Syrian Arab Republic—is the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon. Moreover, its use in Iraq is being pinned on “Islamic State” fighters which, as is commonly known, are currently engaged in terrorist operations in the same areas of the Syrian Arab Republic where the use of chlorine was reported. We firmly believe that this matter must be properly examined.

We also note that the Mission’s second report makes mention of certain materials of which the Mission had yet to obtain and which, it believes, could confirm its conclusions (for example, documents from medical institutions located outside of the Syrian Arab Republic, paragraph 22). As we understand it, since this may concern the most severely affected victims, we suggest that the relevant information be examined in order to gain a full picture of the situation.

The points made above clearly demonstrate that there is still more serious work ahead for the Mission. We expect that following its efforts, the states will be presented with the results of a comprehensive, complete, and impartial investigation of all of the circumstances surrounding the alleged use of chemical weapons, using all available—and reliable—sources.

One more fundamental point:

As we have noted, several delegations have demonstrated a rather casual acceptance of the conclusions in the Mission’s second report, attempting to interpret them, without any objective substantiation, to suit their own purposes. I am referring to the unsubstantiated accusations regarding the implication of the Syrian Government in the alleged use of chemical weapons. I would like to ask these delegations: where and in which section of the report was such a conclusion drawn? Or are we now using the same unscrupulous tactics used to draw the conclusions from Mr Sellström’s mission investigating the use of chemical weapons in August 2013? Everyone is well aware that at that time, the investigation had no evidence to prove that the Syrian Arab Republic stood behind the chemical attack although a number of delegations, despite the obvious, continue to insist otherwise.

This unscrupulous manipulation, in our opinion, does little to boost confidence in the Mission’s efforts.

We request that this statement be issued as an official document of the Forty-Fifth Meeting of the Executive Council and published on the OPCW’s website.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.