



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 FIFTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
REGARDING THE REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT
IN UM-HOUSH**

Mr Chairperson,

We would like to voice our opinion on the report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigating the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the incident of 16 September 2016 in the village of Um-Housh in the province of Aleppo.

From said report, it is clear that the FFM has conducted a great deal of work related to the examination and analysis of massive amounts of information and material evidence concerning this incident. Syria has noted it and is actively working with the FFM in its investigation. The Russian Federation, in line with paragraph 6 of Article X of the Convention, has also provided a great deal of assistance in clarifying all of the circumstances of this incident. Russian military experts from the CBRN unit, per the request of the Syrian Arab Republic, visited the site of the chemical incident and collected necessary samples and other material evidence. In December 2016, these materials were handed over to the custody of the FFM experts.

We note the high level of meticulousness demonstrated by the FFM experts in investigating this incident. During the investigation and per the initiative of the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”), several rounds of consultations were held with FFM experts and representatives of the Russian Federation’s CBRN unit, including remotely by Internet, during which Russian experts were subjected to very thorough and meticulous questioning. In addition to the large amount of material evidence that was handed over, including an unexploded munition filled with a chemical agent, the FFM received exhaustive explanations on all issues of interest. At the same time, the experts of the OPCW must be given their due credit: to the greatest extent possible, they ensured compliance with all of the procedures involved in maintaining the chain of custody for all evidence.

As the result of this work, the FFM came to the unequivocal conclusion that the unexploded mine found in the village of Um-Housh contained the toxic agent mustard gas. Furthermore, it was indicated that two female casualties of this incident were exposed to mustard gas.

We note that information on this incident was submitted by two States Parties to the Convention. The evidence was collected by Russian experts with the highest qualifications in



the field of chemical weapons, in compliance with all standards for handling witnesses and compiling all corresponding reports. An express analysis of samples was even carried out at the site of the incident using specialised equipment.

One cannot help but see a parallel with the FFM report on the incident in Khan Shaykhun, the conclusions of which are primarily built on the testimonies provided by non-governmental opposition groups with dubious reputations and which are known for their direct affiliation with terrorist groups. It has been claimed that they collected samples themselves, without the required qualifications or equipment.

The Russian Federation firmly believes that the perpetrators of the incident involving the use of mustard gas in Um-Housh were terrorists. We are prepared to submit everything at our disposal concerning this incident to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which is currently examining the FFM report. We believe that the conclusions made on this chemical incident will regrettably once again confirm the horrific fact that we have already known for some time now: the terrorists in that region are using not only toxic chemicals, but they have the skills needed to produce chemical warfare agents, as well as the technologies and equipment to produce and deliver chemical weapons. We know that the expert chemists under Saddam Hussein are active in the ISIL (Daesh) terrorist group. The only question remaining is the actual scale of production.

We believe that the JIM, in accordance with its mandate, will conduct a professional investigation into the incident in Um-Housh. We await the identification of the perpetrators of this crime, as well as those who potentially stand behind the perpetrators beyond Syria's borders.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Fifty-Fifth Meeting of the Executive Council.

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