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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-SIXTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL  
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 3**

Mr Chairperson,

I am forced to begin my statement with a response to the statement read today by Permanent Representative of the United States, Mr K. Ward, as it refers to Russia.

The statements directed at our country are unacceptable, both in terms of tone and substance. Actually, we have been presented with an ultimatum: Russia must do this and that.

In this regard, I am obligated to state that our country cannot be spoken to in the language of ultimatums. Those who have made such attempts in the past have learned as much from their own bitter experience.

Only agreements can be made with Russia, but that needs to be done on a basis of equality and with mutual respect. We are ready for that. The ball is in the court of our American partners.

We are well aware that today's meeting was convened primarily because of our American colleagues. Even earlier, our position was that the matter brought here for discussion—the JIM and its mandate—should first and foremost be discussed at the United Nations Security Council. However, seeing how our American colleagues have politicised today's discussion beyond reason, it is clear that they have forgotten that the OPCW is first and foremost a technical Organisation established to ensure the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, rather than to settle political scores.

Now, on to the agenda for today's meeting.

The Russian Federation continues to hold a clear-cut and unequivocal position on the international arena: any use of chemical weapons by anyone and under any circumstances is absolutely unacceptable, and the perpetrators must be held accountable. That is why we, in 2015, supported the United Nations Security Council resolution establishing the JIM, as well as another resolution in 2016 extending its mandate. At the same time, we expected that the mechanism would work independently, professionally, and effectively.



Unfortunately, our expectations were not met. At the briefing on 2 November in Moscow, attended by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Industry and Trade (the National Authority for the Chemical Weapons Convention), we explained why we cannot agree with the results of this investigation.

Presently, one after the other, the representatives of a number of delegations in this room are praising the work of the JIM, asserting that its experts produced work that is both high-quality and highly professional. Yet even as our colleagues become hypnotised by these ritualistic incantations, the seventh report of the JIM is becoming neither more professional nor more objective.

Due to time constraints, I will limit myself to literally a couple of examples to illustrate the substandard quality of the JIM's conclusions.

According to the report, during the alleged bombing of Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, the Syrian plane did not fly over this settlement—it was 5 km away. In particular, this is confirmed by U.S means of objective monitoring (radars), graciously provided by the American command. As per the assessment of Russian experts, this plane—while on its designated flight path, as indicated by the Americans—could not have even theoretically dropped a bomb where the crater was found.

Incidentally, the crater as we see it in photographs could not have in any way formed from the impact of a heavy bomb (500 kg) falling at a high speed. It is more likely that something was exploded on the ground. This is a planned provocation. Yet the JIM matter-of-factly waved away that version basically only on the grounds that no one had an explosive device being planted. But listen, colleagues: this is simply ridiculous. We have been told that the JIM is made up of the best professionals, including individuals with police fieldwork experience. Don't they know that terrorists never invite witnesses to watch them plant munitions? The terrorist that blew himself up in Manchester—did he ask anyone to come watch him putting explosives in his bag? Of course not. Terrorists work on the sly, maliciously, as we have seen recently in Manhattan, and Barcelona and other places before that. These are basic truths known even to a detective in a remote village. So how is it that our colleagues are twisting their tongues with statements about the highest level of professionalism among the JIM members?

I would like to raise another extremely unpleasant matter for our partners. On 5 July this year, an unforgettable briefing was held in this room at which the leaders of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) reported on their investigation into the incident that took place in Khan Shaykhun. At that time, we asked if the Mission was able to clarify the matter of the “dilated pupils” seen in the photographs of Syrian children who had allegedly suffered the effects of sarin, although their pupils in that case would have been constricted. The representatives of the FFM at that time responded that they did not examine that aspect. We were told to wait for the JIM report, and that we would get all of the clarification we needed. But we did not see anything about that in the report.

Neither did we see anything about that in the seventh JIM report. What is this strange silence? After all, these photographs were seen around the world, they became “iconic” depictions of the suffering of the Syrian people. These are the same photographs shown at the United Nations Security Council by United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nikki Haley. When these very photos were shown to President Trump, he—as was

reported in the press—ordered an immediate strike against the al-Shayrat airbase, from which—as it had been put to him—Syrian planes loaded with lethal chemicals had taken off. These photographs have essentially triggered all of the events that followed. I recently happened to speak here in The Hague with one well known expert to whom I posed questions on this matter. Heatedly, he exclaimed: “Don’t you understand that this is an information war!” No, of course we do understand. And that is why we believe that it is critical to identify the perpetrators of this provocation, who caused innocent children to fall victim for the sake of narrow-minded political aims? There can be no forgiveness for those people—both those who carried it out, and those who plotted it.

When speaking about the Syrians, our American partners use the term “obfuscation”—as if Damascus is trying to mislead everyone. Yet aren’t these manipulations with the photographs of dying children yet another obfuscation? And those who machinate similar frightful provocations—and their sponsors alike—should be considered criminals.

I could go on, but there would be no point—we are not, after all, at a technical symposium, we are at a meeting of the Executive Council. But what is the value after all of the ostensibly strong convictions of the JIM that the the Syrian Government is behind the chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun? On what grounds do these convictions stand: on phoney data and witness accounts from members of al-Nusra—who control that region—and the pseudo-humanitarian “White Helmets” NGO affiliated with them, which have already been caught more than once in a bald-faced lie and doctoring facts about the alleged “atrocities of the Bashar Assad regime”? Do they take us for naïve people who will blindly believe anything we’re told?

It would have been possible, in the end, to simply be honest and admit that it was not possible for JIM experts to visit Khan Shaykhun due to the security situation, and that without visiting the site of the incident, the Mechanism is not able to establish the full picture. This is what could have been reported to the United Nations Security Council, rather than misleading it and speaking about yet another allegedly confirmed instance of the “regime atrocities” involving the use of chemical weapons.

The seventh JIM report has been submitted for consideration by the United Nations Security Council—not the OPCW. In New York, the discussion on this matter is far from over. Yet we are forced to discuss this issue since it is on the agenda for the meeting of the Executive Council. Why was this done, and why is it necessary to continue politicising the work of our essentially technical Organisation, and widen the divide? I ask these questions, but I do not expect to hear any answers. In my opinion, things are clear enough as they stand.

We do not accept moral lectures from a government, whose president, in his time, said literally the following with respect to his Latin American colleague: “He is, of course, a son of a bitch, but he’s our son of a bitch!” Shocking cynicism, is it not? Any accusations aimed at Russia about how it is somehow covering up the “crimes” of the Syrian authorities are outright propaganda.

We, of course, also do not accept insinuations about Russia’s alleged unscrupulous attitude toward fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and to ensuring a non-proliferation regime. It is not up to our American partners to lecture us. They might be better off following our example and working on getting rid of their remaining chemical weapons stockpiles.

Alas, as today's statement by the distinguished Ambassador Ward has shown, our American "partners" imagine themselves to be the bearers of the truth in the last instance. From the high rostrums of international organisations, they speak out in the role of ardent accusers of other countries, bestowed with the right to pronounce guilty verdicts. Moreover, looking at them, some of their allies start to speak passionately, their voices cracking. But history has taught us this: whatever bombastic statements are made by our American colleagues needs to be, as a rule, split in two. Recall, if you will, the pathetic picture of Mr Powell, the then Secretary of State of the United States, brandishing a test tube with spores alleged to be anthrax at the United Nations Security Council. This was all done for one objective: to justify the invasion of Iraq, defying international law and spitting, I won't be afraid to use that word, at the Security Council—the unity of which our American partners have nurtured so touchingly. Of course, one would prefer them to nurture it with their actions, rather than just words.

Even their closest allies are well aware that America's appeals need to be approached with extreme caution. The memoirs of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown—"My Life, Our Times"—have just been released in Great Britain. In these memoirs, Gordon Brown, who could hardly have been suspected of disloyalty to Washington, bitterly laments that the Americans, as it turned out, intentionally tricked them in order to gain their support for the Iraqi campaign. They hid from Great Britain a classified report prepared in 2002 by United States military intelligence, in which doubts were cast regarding the existence of WMD in Iraq and its ability to manufacture long-range missiles. As Gordon Brown writes, the American report refuted not only the assertions that Iraq had WMD, but also its ability to manufacture them.

I recall another former British Prime Minister who publicly confessed that his country was dragged into the Iraqi adventure, and even apologised to the families of the lost English soldiers. But who will apologise to the relatives of the tens and hundreds of thousands of victims of the conflict in Iraq, Libya, as well as Syria, where we see the bloodshed, due to, among other things, the short-sighted policies of our American "partners"?

In a word, due to efforts by the United States and those like minds, our Organisation, as the most successful disarmament and non-proliferation forum, is being further removed from its initial form and turned into an arena for political showdowns. The OPCW has already been dealt an irreparable blow. There is no way it would receive the Nobel Prize now. So let us not exacerbate this dangerous schism, but find a path to consensus.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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