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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY G.V. KALAMANOV
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AND
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OF DEFENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AT THE FIFTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Executive Council,

The Russian Federation insisted on calling this extraordinary session of the Executive Council of the OPCW in light of the highly tense situation that is developing due to the serious claims being made by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland against our country related to the alleged violations of the obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

As you know, on 12 March 2018, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland publicly accused the Russian Federation of involvement in the incident in Salisbury on 4 March this year when, as confirmed by the British police, an attack was made against Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia using a nerve agent which some Western countries have classified under the fabricated name “Novichok”.

Unfortunately, the discussion on this matter that began at the Eighty-Seventh Session of the Executive Council did not bring the desired results. The Russian Federation’s proposals for the British side to enter into a direct dialogue with us to clarify the situation were not heard.

Moreover, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland greatly escalated the tension in its bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, having turned to its allies and provoked the expulsion of Russian diplomats from London and a number of other countries. Harsh reciprocal actions by the Russian Federation then followed. The situation has taken on an extremely dangerous and unpredictable nature, and the escalation continues.

The British side continues to avoid any interaction with us in any format. At the same time, it is constantly and publicly demanding something from us for propaganda-based purposes. I will reiterate what we have stated several times: the Russian Federation—even more so than the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—is interested in establishing the truth since the matter at hand involves an attack on the life of Yulia Skripal, a citizen of the Russian Federation, and the way in which this happened is very reminiscent of a terrorist act.



Calling the Russian Ambassador to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 12 March cannot in any way be seen as a “proposal to cooperate” as defined by the Convention or as “a request for legal assistance”. We were given an ultimatum: admit that you committed this crime, and do so immediately, within 24 hours. No comments are needed here. Meanwhile, for some reason it is being said that the Russian Federation has not responded to the questions posed to it. That is not true. We responded to that ultimatum in an extremely clear and concise manner: the Russian Federation had absolutely nothing to do with the chemical incident in Salisbury.

Now with regard to today’s affairs. We are receiving calls from everywhere to cooperate with the OPCW. We hear this from many capitals. Very recently, such a statement was made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Mr Blok. Here—at the Headquarters of our Organisation—and once again officially we state: we are open to a dialogue in any format. We are prepared to cooperate with the OPCW, and within the OPCW. The Russian Federation strives not only to do so, but it intends to do so in strict compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

The fact that we prepared for this meeting serves as confirmation of the seriousness of our intent. The members of our inter-agency delegation include representatives from leading Russian agencies who work with Convention-related matters: the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A Russian expert is here today who can respond to technical questions.

We would like to ask our British colleagues: are they truly, as they claim to be, prepared to cooperate? Can they bring their experts to The Hague? We have listened with great interest to, for example, the representative of the Porton Down laboratory where, according to assertions by the British side, world renowned experts established—having analysed the chemical found at the site of the incident in Salisbury—that it is a “Novichok”-type nerve agent and that it “originated” in the Russian Federation.

And what do we see now? Yesterday, the British television channel “Sky News” broadcast an interview with Gary Aitkenhead, the Chief of the Porton Down military laboratory, who admitted that this laboratory was unable to identify the country that produced the toxic substance. The British official also noted that there is no antidote for so-called “Novichok” and, consequently, no antidotes were used in the incident with the Skripals.

Please provide specific evidence of the Russian Federation’s involvement in the alleged poisoning of Mr Skripal and his daughter. Support your words with facts, rather than public statements alleging that the Russian Federation is refusing to respond to the United Kingdom’s demands to provide certain information about the involvement of our country in this crime.

Our expert from the Russian Ministry of Defence, Professor Doctor of Chemical Sciences I. V. Rybalchenko, will address the insinuations thrown around by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland about the use of a nerve gas in Salisbury.

[I.V. Rybalchenko’s statement follows]

Mr Chairperson,

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Theresa May, made a full range of harsh statements indicating that Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned by a “Novichok”-type nerve gas that could only have been produced in the Russian Federation. The British side presented no real evidence.

In the first days after the incident in Salisbury, the British put out a version stating that the Skripals were poisoned with fentanyl. Later, it was replaced with the version with poisoning by a nerve agent. It is important to note that the mechanism of action of the specified substances on the human body is substantially different. The symptoms of exposure are also different. This gives rise to the question: why were substances with such different mechanisms of action named by British experts and the media?

Presently, the United Kingdom’s main version is that the Skripals were poisoned with a nerve agent known to them by the name “Novichok”.

The term “Novichok”, used for a number of compounds without specifying any structural formulas, was widely available after the publication, in the United States of America in 1995, of a report by The Henry L. Stimson Center entitled “Chemical Weapons Disarmament in Russia: Problems and Prospects (authors: Amy Smithson, Vil Mirzayanov, and Major General Roland Lajoie).

Data about the structure of the family of organophosphorus compounds categorised by the author under the common name of “Novichoks” was provided for the first time in the second edition of the Handbook of Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents, by D. Hank Ellison, 2007. The Handbook sets out the structures of 58 compounds which, according to the author, belong to the “Novichok” group and are organophosphates with various combinations of heteroatom substituents, including oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, fluorine, and bromine atoms. All of these compounds were assigned index names in the American Society Chemical Abstract System, which proves that they were synthesised.

Mirzayanov’s book, “State Secrets: An Insider’s Chronicle of the Russian Chemical Weapons Program”, was published in 2008 in the United States of America; this book provided the structural formula of five compounds and their codes (A-230, A232, A-234, A-242, and A-262), which also put into the “Novichok” group by the author. These formulas do not match the structures that were set out one year earlier in Ellison’s book.

During the Sixteenth Session of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board from 4 to 6 April 2011, an item related to the publication of Mr Mirzayanov’s book was addressed. The report of this session stated (quote): “In December 2008, a former defence scientist published a book, which included information on structures reported to be those of the new agents. Some of these structures meet the criteria for Schedule 2 B4 (S2 B4); however, all others are non-scheduled chemicals. The author claimed that the toxicity of certain “Novichok” agents may exceed that of VX.

“In a discussion of the issue, SAB members emphasised that, to date, there has been no confirmation of the author's claims, nor has any peer review been undertaken in regard to the information on these chemicals in the scientific literature on this subject.” (End quote).

After Mirzayanov's book was published as generally available scientific literature, a number of publications appeared on the research of compounds classified by him and Ellison as "Novichoks". Among others, these included publications in 2009, (the United States of America, and the Czech Republic), 2011 (the United States of America, and the Czech Republic), 2014 (the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Italy), 2015 (a United States Patent), 2016 (the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and India), and 2018 (the Czech Republic). One cannot ignore the fact that a synthesis of live chemical samples would have been needed to conduct this research.

One of the substances named in Mirzayanov's books, as well as its structure and mass spectrum, were registered in the American National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) spectral database in the 1998 version (NIST 98). The database contained an affiliation indicating that the spectrum was provided by an author from the Edgewood center for defense research and development of the United States Army. It stands to note that this fact clearly indicates that this substance was synthesised and underwent spectral, and possibly other, research.

In light of the above facts, one can make the unequivocal conclusion that the toxic substances classified by a number of authors as a family of chemicals under the name "Novichoks", starting from the mid-1990s, were widely circulated and became accessible to many laboratories. In this regard, attributing these toxic agents exclusively to the Russian Federation as their origin is, to put it lightly, incorrect, and is essentially absurd.

With the structural formulas and the synthesis diagrams available, any modern chemical laboratory with the requisite special equipment, level of protection, and sufficiently qualified staff can synthesise and conduct research on "Novichok"-type substances. All synthesis pre-products for these compounds are commercially available to many States. Based on the above, there cannot be any unique markers capable of definitively indicating the country of production of the substance used against the Skripals.

A proper investigation into the poisoning of the Skripals will require joint efforts from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Russian Federation.

More in-depth expert assessments are needed in order to come to any conclusions. The Russian Federation confirms its readiness to cooperate further with the United Kingdom.

[End of I.V. Rybalchenko's speech]

[Mr G.V. Kalamonov's speech continues]

Mr Chairperson,

In light of the facts stated by the Russian expert regarding the development of toxic chemical substances in the world, as well as the concealment by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of investigatory evidence and the denial of consular access to the victims, who are Russian citizens, we believe that actions akin to those of a terrorist attack with the use of a toxic chemical substance were taken against Russian citizens. In this regard, we call for an investigation in line with the existing relevant decisions of the Executive Council and the Report of the Third Review Conference.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland continues to accuse the Russian Federation of serious violations of the Convention—the unlawful use of a chemical weapon on British soil. For this kind of situation, Article IX of the Convention clearly sets out the algorithm of actions concerning consultations, cooperation, and establishing the facts.

However, our British partners—not wishing to hold consultations with us directly—have turned to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW for so-called technical assistance which then transformed—in their statement—into a request for independent technical expertise confirming the results of the investigation conducted by the British side. A team of OPCW experts visited the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, exactly what the Organisation's team did remains unclear. The Executive Council is in the dark about what took place. Within the Technical Secretariat, they are stating that they can share the information at their disposal only with the British side. This situation is completely out of order—I would even say it undermines the foundations of the integrity of our Organisation.

As a result, one can objectively state that against the backdrop of numerous calls for us to cooperate with the OPCW, the Russian Federation has in fact been fully sidelined from any information on the situation. And the Executive Council has been sidelined from it as well.

In this regard, we would like to share our vision of how the resolution of this problem can be put back on track within the legal field of the Convention. Because what we are seeing—the request by the British to the OPCW Technical Secretariat to verify their own findings—is not provided for in the Convention. Most importantly we would like to understand: exactly what do the British expect there to be confirmation of?

I predict that some delegations will ask the question: why was today's meeting convened if the results of the OPCW experts are still unknown? It is important to remember that the Technical Secretariat, according to its mandate, is called upon only to prepare technical conclusions without assigning responsibility or attribution. It can only provide technical assistance insofar as determining the substance that was used in Salisbury. And what then?

The vital need to repair the Russian Federation's cooperation both with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Technical Secretariat in order to clarify the circumstances of this truly serious incident is clear. We have collected a full list of questions for our British partners and the Technical Secretariat. There are also questions for France, which—upon the invitation of the British, as far as we know—is involved in technical cooperation in the investigation of the incident in Salisbury. We would like to circulate these questions.

I will say it once again: we are very serious about organising this work strictly in compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

To be specific: in light of our confirmation of our readiness to cooperate, we believe it necessary that the draft decision that was submitted for your consideration is adopted at today's Executive Council meeting. It is essentially a call by the Executive Council requesting the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to work together in line with the provisions of the Convention, and to instruct the Director-General to facilitate technical cooperation.

We want to emphasise that the Russian Federation will recognise the conclusions of any investigation—especially since this case falls within the purview of the OPCW, and not only the interests of the United Kingdom—if it is based on irrefutable facts and evidence in compliance with all existing procedures of international law and with the mandatory participation of the Russian side.

In convening this Executive Council meeting, the Russian Federation did not only expect to provide an opportunity to delegations to express their points of view and state their positions. We all need to finally calm down, activate the mechanisms of the Convention, and begin to cooperate in a constructive manner.

In light of the United Kingdom's unfriendly, to put it mildly, disposition to us, I would immediately say that we express our readiness for various options: if you do not want to cooperate with us directly, you may do so indirectly, and not only with the participation of the Technical Secretariat, but, for example, within the framework established by an Executive Council decision on a multilateral team of experts including specialists from interested parties. The British side would be able to invite those that it would want to see in that group to participate. But then we would ask some of our partners to place their representatives in that group. Essentially, let us find the best possible route to lead us to the truth of the matter.

We are prepared to go as far as possible. On the table today, you have a draft decision that is constructive and aimed at resolving this problem. If the Executive Council finds it acceptable and we adopt it, then it will be possible to start putting it into motion as early as tomorrow. This is the only way—using the full potential of the Organisation—that together, we can set out on the path to overcoming the crisis that has arisen. I ask the delegations to support the draft decision.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be designated an official document of the Fifty-Seventh Meeting of the OPCW Executive Council.

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