



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Fourth Special Session
26 and 27 June 2018

C-SS-4/NAT.40
26 June 2018
ENGLISH and RUSSIAN only

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY MR G.V. KALAMANOV
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

Russia consistently speaks out against the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstances. The dedication of our country to the objectives and tasks of the Chemical Weapons Convention is confirmed by the early completion in 2017 of the national programme for the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles—three years earlier than the established deadline.

With regard to the agenda for the special session of the Conference of the States Parties and the documents that have been distributed, we find it necessary to note the following.

We have always supported the unbiased and independent investigation of incidents involving the use of chemical weapons. Russia stood among the founders of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria, which was established by United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015). In 2016, Russia voted to extend its mandate through United Nations Security Council resolution 2319 (2016).

In the process of the JIM's functioning, fundamental flaws were identified in its work. Investigations were carried out remotely, without visiting the site of the incidents, the basic norms of the Convention concerning the collection and storage of material evidence were ignored, and altogether biased accounts provided by the opposition were taken for granted, without taking into consideration information from the Syrian authorities. This drove us to doubt the accuracy and non-discriminatory nature of its conclusions, and to disagree with the extension of its mandate.

As a result, the issue of reforming the JIM became a practical matter. However, the joint Bolivian-Russian-Chinese proposal submitted to the United Nations Security Council that was aimed at extending the mandate of the JIM and bringing its work into line with the high standards of the Convention was blocked by the Western partners of a number of standing members of the United Nations Security Council. As a result, it is they who carry full responsibility for the fact that the Mechanism no longer exists.



And now attempts that we find to be completely incomprehensible are being made to grant to the strictly technical Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons the wholly anomalous function of assigning attribution—both bypassing the United Nations Security Council and without amending the Convention as stipulated in Article XV. In fact, this means transforming the OPCW, the objective of which is to provide technical assistance to States Parties in order to fulfil their obligations under the Convention, into a quasi-prosecutory, police, and medical forensics agency.

We would also like to address paragraph 12 of the draft decision submitted by Great Britain, specifically the part concerning the incident in Salisbury, or the “Salisbury affair”. This incident was an excessively ruthless instigation by London against Russia that was actively picked up by the West and, by virtue of Euro-Atlantic solidarity, was enthusiastically driven to absurd levels.

In the British interpretation of paragraph 12 of the draft decision, the materials of the report by the team that carried out a visit to provide technical assistance (TAV/02/18, dated 12 April 2018) serve as confirmation (evidence) of the conclusions made following the results of Great Britain’s national investigation.

However, the “Operating Guidelines” (VER/ODV/79356/18, dated 16 March 2018) that were approved by the Director-General of the Technical Secretariat were not implemented to the extent required. In this regard, the results presented cannot serve as confirmation of the conclusion made in the report regarding exposure to a nerve agent, as there is no concrete data on acetylcholinesterase status since hospitalisation. Information is also absent on the clinical effects and the treatment regimen, especially with regard to the doses of antidotes (oximes and others) administered.

This kind of transition—from patients who have been in a lengthy state of unconsciousness diagnosed as severe to a state of active and conscious behaviour over a short period of time—does not match up with the profile of the effects of nerve agents with an anti-cholinesterase mode of action. If a patient exposed to a nerve agent survives, he or she will require lengthy treatment for the after-effects of intoxication of the body, even if antidotes were promptly administered and followed with comprehensive treatment.

During the provision of “technical assistance”, the activities of the experts were channelled by the British side toward identifying and confirming the sole toxic chemical—with a structure that was suggested by the English side in advance—as the cause of the casualties’ poisoning. In this regard, during the provision of “technical assistance”, the Secretariat fully satisfied the request of Theresa May (EC-87/NAT.7, dated 14 March 2018), the Prime Minister of Great Britain, to confirm the results of the analysis conducted by Great Britain.

However, in line with the provisions of paragraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention, the confirmation of the results of an analysis conducted by any State Party does not constitute technical assistance.

The toxic chemicals referred to as “Novichoks” are the prerogative of Western countries (as set out in the national document by the Russian Federation: EC-M-59/NAT.4, dated 18 April 2018, available at https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/EC/M-59/en/ecm59nat04_e_.pdf).

The States Parties to the Convention did not sign off on the Organisation being used as an instrument to assign attribution—not when they joined the Organisation, and not later, at the stage of ratification of this international agreement.

It is also clear that no transformations of this kind are possible without making substantial amendments to the Convention. The implementation of these types of plans can only be carried out in line with the procedure set out in the Convention: by convening a special session of the Conference on amendments. Attempts to pass this decision at today's regular special session of the Conference are simply illegitimate.

In all of this, we see a clear attempt to distort the mandate of the OPCW, and to undermine the legal framework upon which it rests. This is a destructive idea with which we categorically disagree. The sole international body, aside from international courts, that can identify perpetrators and take punitive measures against them when Member States of the United Nations are concerned is the Security Council.

As a result, the draft decision of the Conference proposed by Great Britain constitutes a direct attack against the exclusive prerogative of the United Nations Security Council and will lead to undermining the authority of the OPCW and the integrity of the Convention. We suggest seriously thinking about the prospects that await us in the event that these designs are realised, and acknowledging the degree of responsibility for the fate of the Organisation and the Convention at this watershed moment.

Will this not lead to a failure in the work of global non-proliferation regimes or even a breakdown of the entire international security system that has developed since World War II, and the central role of the United Nations and its Security Council in international affairs? This path is wrought with unpredictable implications, particularly in the era of the emergence of a new generation of nuclear weapons. People of good faith ought to come together in order to put up a barrier against these reckless plans.

Instead of proposing destructive initiatives, we suggest that our partners urgently look into strengthening the potential of the OPCW with the aim of countering the threat of the use of chemical weapons, conducting a fully-fledged investigation of the incidents of their alleged use, and preventing these types of incidents. First of all, the matter at hand concerns unwavering compliance with all existing rules when carrying out fact-finding activities in relation to the use of chemical weapons. Unfortunately, the fundamental method of collecting and storing evidence (i.e., the chain of custody) is applied in an extremely selective manner.

The two most recent reports released by the FFM (on Ltamenah and Saraqib) are typical examples of this kind of approach. For some reason, the main sources of data for the investigators were from the "White Helmets", known for their provocative pseudo-humanitarian activities.

At the same time, it bears noting the 21 June 2018 interview of member of the House of Lords of the British Parliament Baroness Caroline Cox after her trip to Syria, in which she stated: "I should express my appreciation to Russia for aiding the Syrian armed forces in pushing out ISIS and other Islamist groups from a large part of that country's territory. We have spoken with an enormous number of people in different parts of Syria, and they have all been against the jihadists and their brutality. In the province of Latakia, I met a woman whose husband,

and then her son, was beheaded by Islamists before her very eyes. In a war, people die from weapons. But where these fighters are, they are also cutting heads off. We do not want that.”¹

I should note that Baroness Cox submitted a report on this matter to her colleagues at the House of Lords entitled “Voices from Syria”.

Based on the witness accounts of the “White Helmets”, an evidentiary base is also being formed with the view that chemical weapons were used by Government armed forces. At the same time, the experts on the FFM never visited the locations where, as is being confirmed, these incidents took place; meanwhile, all of the samples from Ltamenah and Saraqib were received from the hands of the “White Helmets”. Is it truly possible in this case to say that the investigation was carried out objectively and in line with the canon of the Convention? In this regard, we would also welcome a decision by the United States State Department to freeze its financing of the “White Helmets”.

We propose focussing on resolving relevant, urgent problems. This means boosting trust in the conclusions of the work of a variety of in-the-field missions, first and foremost the FFM. The path to that end can be found by bringing the activities of these structures—and the internal regulatory documents of the Secretariat itself—into strict compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

It is then necessary to deal once and for all with the fact that the Organisation’s established procedure for the collection and storage of material evidence (i.e., the chain of custody) should be implemented not selectively, but in all incidents under investigation, without exception. This principle cannot be ignored in some situations, while clinging to each and every comma in the regulatory documents in others.

It is important to take a decision to ensure that the preparations for these missions are carried out with due account for the best practices in place at other international organisations (balanced team membership, including from a geographical standpoint) and the United Nations in particular.

We recall that in 2013, the final report of the Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties, which was convened to review the procedures of the Convention, recorded the unanimous commitment of the States Parties to activate their efforts to prevent any potential malicious use of toxic chemicals by non-State actors, such as terrorists.

In this regard, on multiple occasions the Russian delegation has called for the States Parties to cooperate, exchange information, and participate in consultations in good faith in order to prevent incidents involving the use of toxic chemicals and to avoid any politicisation or related tensions.

More than once, we have expressed our concern that the use of chemicals with serious toxic properties remains a reality, in spite of the considerable efforts of the OPCW and the enormous contribution of all of the States Parties to the implementation of obligations under the Convention.

¹ Translator’s Note: The original quote in English is not available.

Russia fully and completely supports United Nations General Assembly resolution 56/1 (2001) and United Nations Security Council resolutions 1368 (2001) and 1373 (2001), which concern the terrorist attacks that took place on 11 September 2001, and in relation to which Russia has urged the States Parties numerous times to carry out their obligations under the Convention, including the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles, the prevention of their production and the malicious use of chemicals and technologies, and to undertake all possible efforts in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article VII of the Convention.

It is the resolution of these current problems that is the focus of the Russian draft decision of the Conference. It contains clear-cut points of orientation for joint efforts, dictated by common sense and care for the fate of the OPCW. We believe that it can be accepted as a basis for discussion.

We believe that the States Parties should, finally, forget their ambitions and come together for the sake of retaining the integrity of the Organisation and preventing its division.

Mr Chairperson, we ask that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention and published on the internal and external webpages of the OPCW.

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