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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 EIGHTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,

The briefing that was just held has once again confirmed our opinion that the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) falls far short of the high standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We see here both double standards and the liberal interpretation of its own founding documents, which govern how inspection activity should be conducted. There is practically no compliance with the “chain of custody”, which concerns the collection and safekeeping of material evidence.

Today we are again forced to revisit the same specific issues that, as practice shows, are barely distinguishable in the flurry of statements about high levels of professionalism and the unbiased and transparent activities carried out by FFM experts. We give due credit for their complex work. However, being completely conscientious, we are forced to state that the methods and the results of the Mission’s activities give rise to some serious doubts as to those assertions.

A paradoxical situation has developed where two types of information exist for the FFM, two different approaches to investigations. On the one hand, there are the “infallible” facts provided by parties that are in opposition to Damascus, such as the “White Helmets”. On the other hand, there are the materials submitted by the official authorities of Syria or Russian military experts.

So we end up with completely different reports: one kind that is like a carbon copy, on the incidents that took place in Saraqib and Ltamenah, where everything seems to point to the confirmed use of chemical weapons, and then we have the pro forma boilerplates on Karm Al-Tarrab and Al-Hamadaniya, where an “irritant” was allegedly used, but definitely not a chemical weapon.

How can we talk about the transparency of the FFM’s activities if we have to openly ask to hold these briefings?! The last one was held on 5 July 2017, and nearly half a dozen FFM reports have been issued since.

Again, we repeat the undeniable truth. In order to effectively perform its work, the FFM should deploy directly to the site of incidents and independently (!) collect samples, as is



stipulated in the Convention, instead of conducting remote investigations from a distance, drawing on information from dubious sources—such as the “White Helmets”, which are affiliated with terrorists and generously sponsored—and internet-based news.

All of this goes to show that our Organisation’s investigations into incidents involving chemical weapons need a complete overhaul, while the work of the OPCW’s in-the-field missions should be under the control of its management bodies. To that end, clear instructions approved by the Council or the Conference of the States Parties are needed. It is with this in mind that the Russian Federation, together with a number of States, has submitted relevant proposals for the consideration of the Council and the Conference.

Although these proposals are not yet the subject of discussion, we are confident that in the near future, the majority of States Parties will realise that there is no option other than serious reform. If we are able to set straight the work of the FFM and align it with the requirements of the Convention, then the findings of its investigations will not give rise to any doubts, and they can be presented not only within the OPCW, but outside it as well. Our proposals (the latest of which was the draft decision of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties submitted jointly with China) retain their relevance.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Eighty-Eighth Session of the Executive Council and published on the Organisation’s external website.

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