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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BASSAM SABBAGH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

**UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(G): TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S ACTIVITIES:
UPDATE ON THE OPCW FACT-FINDING MISSION IN SYRIA**

Mr Chairperson,

Syria has expressed on multiple occasions its grave concern over the negative aspects and flaws in the working modalities and methodology of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). Regrettably, there has been no change or improvement in those working modalities, which had affected significantly the findings of the FFM and the credibility of its reports, as clearly evidenced by the final FFM report on the alleged Douma incident of 7 April 2018, issued in document S/1731/2019 (dated 1 March 2019).

The release of the report on this incident has raised serious concerns among a number of States Parties regarding legal and technical aspects of the work of the FFM and its professionalism. Indeed, the report contained many contradictions and inconsistencies and a grave distortion of the facts on the ground. It was also lacking with respect to material evidence and the credibility of witnesses.

At a later stage, several important analyses of this report surfaced, analyses by highly-recognised international studies and research centres and well-known independent experts, including the British Working Group on Syria, led by Professor Robinson, and two international researchers and journalists, namely David Miller and Robert Fisk.

Also, the leaked report of one FFM member, investigator Ian Henderson, has cast further doubt on the credibility of the final report on the Douma incident, confirming clearly the validity of the positions expressed by many delegations at this Council. The leaked report was also consistent with the analyses by international studies and research centres and independent experts.

The importance of these international scientific studies and of Mr Henderson's report lies in the fact that they touch upon an issue which is at the core of the FFM mandate, as the said studies and report are centred on a key point, which is that the presence of a chlorine cylinder at a particular location does not constitute proof that chlorine has been used as a weapon at that location. The presence of such a cylinder, manually placed, at a particular location, means that those who have placed it there intended to lead people to believe that an incident



involving the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon has taken place, or, more accurately, wanted to stage a false-flag incident involving such use, while the cylinder falling on the floor through the roof, as a projectile, means that it has been used in an attack. The logic of this analysis is not about identifying those responsible either for placing the cylinder manually, or for its use as a projectile in an attack. This is the key point that certain delegations are avoiding discussing or are trying to obscure.

Yesterday, some States have defended vigorously the professionalism of the FFM members. Such professionalism ought to have appeared in two things: first, the FFM team should base its procedures on firm legal rules, and tangible material evidence. Second, those who have written the report should be able to present convincing scientific clarifications and explanations. These two aspects were lacking during the discussion of the Douma report. Indeed, the clarifications given by the team members in their oral and written responses were superficial, general and unconvincing. Some delegations considered that criticising the FFM report amounted to criticising the professionalism of the entire Technical Secretariat and the Director-General. In truth, this description is inflammatory and misleading, for the Director-General has repeatedly stressed that the FFM conducts its work in an independent manner and that he does not interfere with its work. Consequently, making critical comments on the work of the FFM team does not amount in any way to disparaging the Director-General or the professionalism of the Technical Secretariat as a whole.

Other States have defended the credibility of the report. Such credibility should have been achieved through a number of elements, including, inter alia, robust and consistent views among those preparing the report; absence of the gaps, inconsistencies or contradictions that have been noted by readers in different parts of the report; the necessary material and tangible evidence; a single working methodology, consistent with the provisions of the Convention and the terms of reference governing the work of the FFM. All these elements were lacking in the Douma report. Indeed, it appeared that there were dissenting views among those working on the report, in addition to a complete lack of evidence, and the existence of legal gaps relating to the absence of chain of custody for the samples collected. There are also contradictions in witnesses' testimonies, an incomprehensible selective approach to choosing witnesses, and the inability to confirm the presence of witnesses at the location and time of the incident. Hence the question: where is the credibility?

Our colleague, the representative of the United States, suggested yesterday that Syria and Russia were responsible for delaying the arrival of the inspectors at Douma. I wish to clarify for you some precise details concerning the deployment of the FFM team to Douma: the incident occurred on Saturday 7 April 2018. On the morning of Sunday 8 April, I called by telephone the former Director-General, Mr Ahmet Üzümcü, requesting on behalf of the Syrian Government that an FFM team be immediately deployed to Douma. He informed me that it would take at least a few days to set up a team and arrange for its travel to Syria. And, in effect, the FFM team arrived at Beirut in two stages: the advance team on 11 April, then the rest of the team on 12 April. Team members were expected to travel to Syria on 13 April, but they stayed in Beirut because the United States and other western countries were threatening to attack Syria, which they did on 14 April. So, who prevented the FFM team from travelling to Damascus until 15 April? Who hindered the arrival of inspectors at Douma? Further, it was Syria and Russia that provided the FFM team members with protection inside and outside Douma, thus enabling them to conduct their mission.

The impartiality and objectivity of those who have prepared the report have been put into question owing to the FFM team having completely ignored the fact that terrorist groups were in possession of toxic chemicals, in particular chlorine, although the team has found, at one of terrorists' warehouses situated close to the incident location, a cylinder identical to those found at the Douma incident sites. Further, the team has neglected the role of the "White Helmets", the arm of the al-Nusra Front, in filming and preparing the stage for this fabricated incident.

In light of all the above, on 1 July, my delegation requested that the Technical Secretariat hold another briefing session on the Douma incident report. Regrettably, however, the Technical Secretariat did not respond positively to this request.

My delegation strongly believes that preserving professionalism in the work of this Organisation, and upholding its credibility, is a common goal for the States Parties and the Technical Secretariat. We are still of the view that a robust report must withstand scrutiny, and that questions or discussions on the report should not be evaded. Bringing the whole truth to light is worth the effort. We call upon the Technical Secretariat and the States Parties to work together to reconsider the evaluation of the Douma incident investigations in order to reveal the truth, taking into consideration the differing and divergent views voiced by a number of States, and to study the leaked report of investigator Henderson and review other scientific studies and analyses published on that incident.

On 1 May, our Deputy-Foreign Minister and Head of the Syrian National Authority addressed a letter to the Director-General of the OPCW, requesting him to start in-depth and comprehensive discussions on the terms of reference of the FFM to fill the existing loopholes and make the working methods of the FFM transparent and fully consistent with the standards and provisions stipulated in the Convention and its Verification Annex. We hope that this request will receive a positive response.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-First Session of the Executive Council.

I thank you.

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