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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ALEXANDER V. SHULGIN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW  
AT THE NINETY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Mr Director-General,

The delegation of the Russian Federation is pleased to welcome the Ambassador of Italy, H.E. Mr. Perugini, as the Chairperson of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”). We would like to assure you of our full support and readiness for constructive cooperation over the course of the current and following sessions of the Council under your wise leadership.

Naturally, we would like nothing better than to calmly discuss the issues on the agenda of the Council. Unfortunately, current circumstances do not allow for business as usual. The problems within the Organisation are multiplying and becoming more urgent, with no clear prospects for resolving this deadlock.

Russia is deeply concerned with the current state of affairs at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and thus with its future as well. There is an obvious, deepening divide among the States Parties caused by the politicisation of technical matters within the purview of the Organisation. It is especially telling in the case of investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. All of this altogether drastically reduces the efficiency of the Organisation, making it impossible to focus on tackling the current tasks set out in the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”), which have been successfully implemented for many years.

It is difficult to reach an understanding even on such a technical issue as introduction changes to the Schedules of Chemicals in the Annex to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It should be openly recognised that there is no unity among us when it comes to the approaches and methods used to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. Russia continues to proceed from the fact that the decision to establish the “attribution” mechanism in the OPCW, taken by the Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”) last June by vote, is illegitimate and is a direct violation of the prerogatives of the United Nations Security Council, and reaches far beyond the framework of the Convention and the mandate of the Organisation. Unfortunately, it must be said that these days the governing rules of and principles for the operation of the OPCW, which were developed and have proven their effectiveness over the past two decades, are now “easily” reviewed.



We are deeply concerned, not only by the decision of the Conference in June 2018, but also by the way in which it is being carried out. For example, we have informed the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) and the States Parties of our legal assessment of illegitimacy of the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the so called “International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on International Crimes Committed in Syria”. We believe that without observing the procedures prescribed in the Convention (namely, the consent of the governing bodies of the Organisation) the Secretariat did not have the mandate to sign an international agreement involving key functions and obligations under the Convention, including the handling of confidential information. Even more so with a third party that does not have a legal status of its own. We were in no way satisfied with the explanations we received on this matter from the legal experts of the Secretariat.

The signing of such a Memorandum essentially uproots the cornerstone principles of handling sensitive data that were set forth in the Convention. It was one of the reasons why Russia denied access to confidential information to members of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

We have a lot of questions regarding the establishment of the IIT and the start of its activities, which essentially lay the foundation for the functioning of the “attribution” mechanism. That is the understanding one arrives at after careful examination of the latest note by the Secretariat on the IIT. It does not contain convincing information for evaluating what is taking place in that area. For over six months, some preparatory activities have been under way, and we know virtually nothing about it. For some reason everything pertaining to the IIT is being carried out exclusively within the core of the Secretariat. Aren't the activities of the Team supposed to be controlled by the governing bodies of the Organisation, and its mandate to be discussed within the Council? Are the States Parties indeed only supposed to “take note” via the Secretariat's documents on how attribution is being introduced into the OPCW, without the right to express their views on it?

Despite the vociferous statements made regarding balanced geographical representation and gender parity within the IIT, we also see that most members of the attribution team are the nationals of States that are not exactly known for their love of the Syrian Government, to put it mildly. The question inevitably arises: are they really capable of being impartial?

In general, we are concerned about the approaches taken with the Syrian “chemical dossier”. We are convinced that OPCW's activities in this area should revert to being technical. We should abandon the “emergency” mindset and try to resolve the remaining issues on a pragmatic and depoliticised basis. As early as January 2016, the Secretariat confirmed that the chemical weapons stockpiles in Damascus were completely eliminated. “Outstanding” matters should be addressed in accordance with the norms of the Convention and without any attempts to place unfounded blame on the legitimate Syrian authorities.

In this regard, we support the objective of the Secretariat and Syria to take a step-by-step approach to resolving concerns via a structured dialogue. We hope that this mode of action and prioritisation of tasks, given the political resolve of the parties, will finally make it possible to move the discussion process on the Syrian declaration forward. At the same time, the collaboration of the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and inspections of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) sites in Barzah and Jamraya should not be tied to the Secretariat's “attribution” initiatives.

It is well known that Institute 6000 was destroyed by a three-State coalition missile strike in April 2018, without having declared any reasons and without any coordination. None of the Secretariat representative visits to the SSRC in the previous year registered any illegal

activities. Still, the issue of Institute inspections remains open. We believe it is crucial to wait for explanations from Syria regarding the traces of Scheduled chemicals found in the samples collected in Barzah in November 2018. If the Secretariat eventually concludes that the SSRC shows no signs of activities violating the Convention, the matter of these inspections should be closed.

We see the situation that has developed with the FFM's activities as an absolute failure. As we can clearly see, the Mission's work methods do not meet the high standards of the Convention. This became very clear after a recent leak of an internal Secretariat document concerning the investigation into the Douma incident on 7 April 2018. The facts revealed in the published technical report by Secretariat expert Ian Henderson, and a number of reports by independent researchers—in particular, a large number of British and United States researchers—and the assessments of Russian military specialists reveal a different picture of the chemical incident in Douma. It is drastically different from the official point of view presented in the report issued on 1 March this year.

The conclusions that were drawn after an analysis of the events in Douma cast serious doubt on the objectivity of all of the investigative actions conducted by the Mission. We believe the FFM must urgently be reformed, specifically to reconsider its "terms of reference", which should be confirmed by the Executive Council, and to enhance the Mission's transparency.

This is why we considered it necessary to organise a supplementary briefing on the margins of the current session of the Executive Council, with the participation of all FFM specialists involved in the Douma investigation. It could have allowed us to discuss alternatives, exchange views, including with the people who visited the incident site. It is no secret to anyone that the FFM team leaders working on the final report were never there at all. For instance, Mr Sami Barrek—I will call him by name—spent only two or three hours in Damascus before leaving to a neighbouring country. At the same time, regardless of these obvious facts, we were denied a briefing. This is deeply regrettable.

We would like to underscore that holding briefings for States Parties on certain issues is the exclusive prerogative of the Director-General. The vote provoked by the United States delegation at the Ninetieth Session of the Executive Council in March this year on whether to hold this event is nothing but the attempt of well-known countries to impose the interpretation of the incident that serves their own interests, justifying the air strike on Syria in violation of the United Nations Charter. This was an act of aggression against a sovereign State, constituting a blatant violation of international law.

In the statements by the permanent representatives of the United States and Canada to the OPCW, as well as a number of other delegations, we have heard relentless accusations that the Syrian authorities are allegedly using chemical weapons against their own citizens, are not cooperating with the OPCW as they should, and are concealing some of their past military chemical programme.

And who is actually accusing the Syrians? First and foremost, the United States, which as it is well known, easily violates international law at the drop of a hat and, together with its allies, carries out air strikes against a sovereign State. Clearly, no OPCW investigations are necessary for them. Nor evidence, apparently. In April 2018, the former Director-General A. Üzümcü issued a press release stating that the FFM intended to go to Damascus to conduct investigations. In Washington and two other capitals this press release was examined and, without a second thought, orders were issued to launch a missile strike. This just goes to show that these champions of the interests of the OPCW do not in fact have a sliver of respect

for our Organisation. The United States is playing the roles of the judge, jury, and executioner.

It is Washington and two other capitals that sponsor pseudo-humanitarian NGOs like the “White Helmets”, the sole objective of which is to discredit the Syrian Government and orchestrate provocations that border on crimes.

Official Damascus is being accused of allegedly continuing to conceal some of its chemical stockpiles. But isn't it the position of the United States and the delegations supporting it impeding the work of the Syrian Declaration Assessment Team? Thanks to our American partners, any technical questions the Team may have for Syrians become politicised after statements that Syria has to admit it deliberately hid something. Would it not be better to take a good look in the mirror before ordering others around?

Even though the Convention entered into force many years ago, we are yet to achieve one of its main goals: the irreversible and comprehensive elimination of chemical weapons. In this regard, we call upon the United States—currently the only country with declared chemical weapon stockpiles—to consider the possibility destruction thereof as soon as possible.

We have taken note of the recent progress report on chemical demilitarisation in the United States. With the existing financial, material, human, and technological resources, the assurances that the United States is compliant with the established destruction deadlines are not enough. We would like to see the results. We hope (and I think this is an opinion shared by many delegations) that the United States will follow Russia's example by destroying its chemical stockpiles before the established deadline and in strict compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

Within the context of the extreme politicisation of the Organisation's activities and the divide among its members on key aspects of the agenda, we appreciate the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement and China aimed at searching for ways to bridge the gaps between positions, and to reinstate the OPCW's inherent spirit of consensus. In this regard, we highly value the proposal to establish an Open-Ended Working Group as a platform for discussion aimed at finding mutually acceptable solutions for a number of pressing issues. We regret that the position of certain delegations present in this very room prevents us from taking a decision on this matter during the current session of the Council.

The Russian delegation will present its thoughts on other topics during the discussion of the corresponding agenda items.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be distributed as an official document of the Ninety-First Session of the OPCW Executive Council.