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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-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

First of all, my delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by H.E. Ambassador Haifa Aissami Madah, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Members of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Convention, and China.

The Syrian Arab Republic joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) in 2013 and has since implemented all of its obligations under the Convention. The Syrian Arab Republic has completed the destruction of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities in an exemplary manner. That was an unprecedented achievement, accomplished under difficult and complex circumstances, surpassing even what has been done by certain States that had joined the OPCW since its inception, one of which is still dragging its feet to this day when it comes to destroying its massive arsenal of chemical weapons and their production facilities.

While reiterating its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, the Syrian Arab Republic voices its serious concern at attempts by certain States, in particular the United States of America, which, in order to serve their agendas, continue to level groundless accusations and spread deceitful allegations and fabrications against Syrian authorities.

Syria has cooperated with the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”) and its various teams, and has been committed to achieving progress with strong momentum within the framework of the Structured Dialogue launched by the Director-General early this year. Syria looks forward to the new round of consultations to be conducted by the Declaration Assessment Team from 14 to 23 October and hopes that discussions regarding all unresolved issues in the Syrian declaration will be completed in order to close those issues as soon as possible.

Also, Syria continues its cooperation with the Fact-Finding Mission, providing it with everything necessary to facilitate its work, and is looking forward to the Fact-Finding Mission completing its investigations into the incidents reported by Syria in 2017 and 2018. However, Syria regrets that the Fact-Finding Mission did not abide by the provisions of the Convention, nor by the Terms of Reference governing its work. Syria regrets that the Fact-Finding Mission has contented itself with remote investigations, refused to visit the



locations of the attacks under various pretexts, and relied on the analysis of open-source photographs and videos fabricated by the so-called “White Helmets”, an off-shoot of the terrorist *Jabhat al-Nusra*. Moreover, the Fact-Finding Mission has obtained samples that it had not collected itself and that lack a legal chain of custody, and has interviewed eye witnesses brought from the breeding ground of terrorist groups. This is why Syria has repeatedly voiced its serious concerns regarding the working methods of the Fact-Finding Mission, and has demanded that these methods be revised and updated so that the Fact-Finding Mission can produce professional and credible reports and findings that can be endorsed unanimously by Member States of the OPCW, instead of being a cause of division among them and of their failure to adopt the Mission’s reports and findings.

In this regard, my delegation notes that Syria has reiterated its official request to the OPCW that a Fact-Finding Mission team be deployed to the city of Khan Sheikhoun and the village of Ltamenah, which were recently liberated from terrorist groups, in order to investigate the incidents that occurred previously there and to reach real findings, instead of conducting fictitious investigations from the Turkish territory, far from the incident location.

What is deplorable is that the U.S. Administration is prejudging the outcome of the Fact-Finding Mission investigations into alleged cases of use of chemical weapons in Syria, drawing its own conclusions and making its own verdicts. Of course, it is no surprise that such behaviour coincides with significant positive changes taking place in Syria, both on the battlefield, with the terrorists being defeated, and on the political front, with progress being made in the political process. In this respect, Syria deplores the statements made by United States Secretary of State Pompeo concerning the alleged incident of 19 May and his accusations against the Syrian Arab Army. The least one can say about these statements is that they are utter lies and constitute an encroachment on the OPCW mandate. Syria believes that that statement was part of the United States' attempts to hinder Syrian Government efforts aimed at restoring stability and security across the country, and to deceive the public opinion and find justifications and pretexts to perpetrate yet another aggression against Syrian territory.

Everyone now knows the crimes that terrorist groups of all denominations have committed against the Syrian people, including with the use of chemical weapons. Everyone also knows the regional and international sponsors of these groups. Syria has provided the Secretariat and the Security Council, officially and regularly, with all information available to it on terrorists’ activities, including their transfer and possession of toxic chemicals and their preparations to stage fabricated attacks involving the use of chemicals, in order to then accuse the Syrian Arab Army thereof. Syria believes that what is required now in order to eliminate once and for all the threat of terrorist chemical activities is to focus international efforts on confronting this real danger, on achieving the effective implementation of all the provisions of the Convention, without politicisation, and on taking a firm stand regarding States that cover up the crimes of terrorist groups.

The Syrian Arab Republic still considers that the Investigation and Identification Team lacks legitimacy, since it was established not with consensus, but with the support of less than half of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and in violation of its provisions. This is a dangerous precedent in assigning to a technical organisation issues falling within the mandate of the international body concerned with issues of international peace and security. Therefore, Syria, together with other States, does not recognise the legitimacy of the Investigation and Identification Team and refuses that it be granted access to confidential

information submitted by Syrian authorities to the OPCW, and hence rejects any and all of its future outcomes.

The Syrian Arab Republic emphasises the need to work seriously to achieve the universality of the Convention, and believes strongly in the need to make the Middle East region a zone free of weapons of mass destruction to achieve regional and international peace and security. In this regard, Syria has supported the decision adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its Seventy-Third Session, entitled “Convening a Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction”. The task of convening this conference was entrusted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Syria is looking forward to this conference, to be held next month in New York, yielding fruitful and impactful results.

The adoption of the OPCW budget for 2020 is one of the important responsibilities of the States Parties. Since my delegation believes that it is difficult to achieve consensus on specific issues, chiefly on the financing of the so-called “Investigation and Identification Team” from the regular budget and the 2017 cash surplus, it joins the other delegations calling for addressing the various elements related to the OPCW budget for 2020 through several decisions. In this regard, my delegation requests that the teams working within the Secretariat, such as the Declaration Assessment Team and the Fact-Finding Mission, be funded from the regular budget so that they are not left at the mercy of the politicised conditions imposed by some donor States, chief among which is the United States of America.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Second Session of the Executive Council and posted on the public website of the OPCW.

I thank you.

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