

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION****STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A. V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM 7 (H)**

Distinguished Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Colleagues,

Today, against the backdrop of a number of regular statements by several delegations on the high level of professionalism and dedication of the experts on the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria, we are forced to once again state that we cannot fully share these assessments. We acknowledge the efforts of the FFM, working in extremely challenging conditions. Nevertheless, like a number of other delegations present in this room today, we have quite a few concerns about the work of this special Mission.

Let me start by saying that the task of bringing the FFM's working methods into alignment with the standards and requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention") remains relevant. This is something we still have to work on, unfortunately. Conducting remote investigations without visiting the sites of incidents and obtaining material evidence from dubious sources— from third parties, that is—has become a routine practice.

We fully support our Syrian colleagues in raising the issue of updating the FFM's terms of reference—it is long overdue. Only by revising this fundamental document, with due consideration of the experience accumulated over time, can we hope that the FFM will work with greater efficiency. Until this problem is settled, we will continue to circle back to the issue of unconvincing investigations over and over again. This has a negative impact both on the atmosphere within our Organisation and its global authority. Once again, let me stress that our criticism is in no way aimed at discrediting the FFM; to the contrary, we seek to optimise the work of the Mission and bring it into full compliance with the Convention and today's realities.

I would now like to address the FFM reports. The most recent published document dealt with the incident in the Syrian city of Douma on 7 April 2018. Russian experts who visited the site, Syrians, and a number of independent international experts have all expressed disagreement with the conclusions of the investigation into this high-profile attack. In order to get to the truth of the matter, we turned to the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter, "the Secretariat"). We requested that it organise a closed briefing with participation of all team members, without exception, who have been involved in the investigation into the attack



at any stage. It was important to do so, as diametrically opposed views on what happened existed within the FFM itself. In particular, a substantiated opinion was voiced that a falsified chemical attack had taken place and that chlorine cylinders were manually carried onto the premises. Our request for a briefing was denied.

We also asked the Secretariat to publish materials from the three so-called “independent” assessments of mechanical engineering, ballistics, and metallurgy upon which the FFM had based its conclusions. This would give us a clear understanding of the degree to which the arguments of outside experts allow us to state with confidence that in one case, “the structural damage to the rebar-reinforced concrete terrace at Location 2 was caused by an impacting object with a geometrically symmetric shape and sufficient kinetic energy to cause the observed damage”, and that in another case “after passing through the ceiling and impacting the floor at lower speed, the cylinder continued an altered trajectory, until reaching the position in which it was found”.

To our deep disappointment, however, the Secretariat rejected this request as well. We had not even requested the disclosure of the names of the experts that were engaged, their nationality, or any other personal data that would make it possible to identify them. In this respect, we cannot accept the argument that this maintains the secrecy of the identities of the experts contracted to consider such sensitive issues.

The publication of technical documents (specifically: mathematical calculations, diagrams and layouts, computer-generated models, etc.) are in no way capable of compromising the independent and unbiased work of the experts free of any outside interference. Thus any references to confidentiality here are clearly irrelevant. In these circumstances, the doubt may even arise as to whether these assessments were even conducted. And the refusal to publish these materials can be interpreted as an attempt to conceal that fact.

We are concerned not only by the issues that I addressed above; we are also concerned by the fact that investigations are being conducted into attacks in which, according to available information, terrorist and extremist organisations operating in Syria have been involved. In particular, the reasons for the delay of the FFM investigation into the chemical attack in Aleppo committed by terrorists on 24 November 2018 remain unclear. The Syrian side has provided information on the incident. Almost a year has passed. So far, not even a preliminary report has been presented to the States Parties.

We have heard comments from the head of the FFM that the Mission was waiting for some additional materials from the Russian military. We would like to state clearly that the Russian Ministry of Defence has provided to the Syrian side all evidence of the chemical attack that it had collected; in turn, Syria submitted this to the Secretariat. In this respect we have a legitimate question: what else needs be done to bring this investigation to its logical conclusion?

As time is short, I will conclude my statement by calling on the Secretariat to start rectifying the situation concerning the FFM’s work. This is something that needs to be done urgently in the interest of the OPCW.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Second Session of the Executive Council.