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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
AGENDA ITEM 24**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

We would like to support our Syrian colleagues, who have spoken out in favour of an appropriate response by the management of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to new information providing evidence of the possible falsification of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report on the incident that took place in the Syrian town of Douma on 1 March 2019.

I would remind those present that from the very beginning, the investigation of this incident went down a rather wayward road. Without even waiting for the results of the FFM's work, right at the start, the troika of well known States—in violation of international law—launched a missile strike against Syria, which is a fully fledged member of the United Nations and a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Incidentally, this was done at a time when the inspection team had already reached Damascus. Had the attack been launched a bit later, OPCW inspectors would have been hit in the strike. As a result, the aforementioned countries demonstrated their disregard for the activities of the OPCW. Furthermore, this criminal act gave everyone a clear signal: Syria was to blame for the incident in Douma, and there could be no other opinion. And that is how what can now openly be called an outrageous story all began.

Later, once the OPCW investigation into this incident had begun, some of our Western colleagues—Mr K. Ward, the Permanent Representative of the United States, in particular—mockingly stated that Russian military servicemen were actually covering up their tracks and destroying evidence at the site of the alleged chemical attack, thereby assisting Damascus to allegedly sweep everything under the rug. Meanwhile, our military police were risking their own lives to ensure the safety and security of the FFM team members. At the same time, the Syrian authorities did everything possible to ensure the uninterrupted work of the Mission.

Almost immediately after the publication of the FFM report, the Western media began publishing analyses from independent observers casting doubt upon the accuracy of the conclusions drawn by the Mission. Of note is the admission of BBC producers that the incident in Douma was a set-up; it essentially confirmed the information that was presented

in 2018 in The Hague at a press conference with Syrian citizens that had become the unwilling participants of this orchestrated farce. Remarkably, most Western States opted not to attend this press conference which, in our opinion, was a major mistake on their part. Regarding the important information provided by the Syrians that participated in that memorable press conference, it was never, to our great surprise, mentioned in the FFM's final report.

Gradually, the number of doubts as to the legitimacy of the conclusions in the Douma report reached critical mass. The conclusions of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic concerning this provocation was confirmed by the staff of the same Mission team that worked in Douma, and their opinion became part of the public domain. Now, the findings of this odious document are being subject to the scrutiny of international experts, scientists, and public figures—the impartiality of whom would be difficult to challenge.

Just imagine: the situation has reached the point where many invested people are concerned about the authority of the Organisation, and are trying to reach out to all of the members of the OPCW and the Secretariat, while understanding just how ruinous the state of affairs has become. I am now speaking primarily about the open collective letter that was sent by email to all of the delegations represented at the OPCW. It was signed by well known people, including the first Director-General of the Secretariat, Mr Bustani. By the way, most States Parties are trying to keep this under wraps at this session of the Conference.

At yesterday's sitting, the honourable Permanent Representative Mr Ward compared the Secretariat with "the calm centre of the storm". In other words, the situation surrounding The Hague is reminiscent of an actual storm. And yet who but the United States and a number of the States sympathetic to them would provoke politicisation of the OPCW by including contentious and controversial issues on the agenda—not to mention the fact that they are the ones changing the profile of the Organisation by assigning to it functions that are completely extrinsic to it according to the Convention. It is well known that it is the United States of America demonstrating its disregard today for the norms of international law, changing them into some kind of "rules" that they are making up as they go along.

Distinguished delegates, we are being assured that the OPCW is our common ground, the very place that we can share our concerns in the hope that, at the very least, they will be considered. It seems as though today we have just such an opportunity. There are a number of States that are concerned by the new information on the alleged chemical incident in Douma and that are insisting that we finally get down to the truth of the matter.

To leave everything as it is and pretend that nothing out of the ordinary has taken place would be a mistake. We are convinced that the failure to act will only undermine confidence in the activities of the FFM and the Secretariat itself.

We suggest that we calmly, and without excess emotion, without fanning the flames, get down to the bottom of the matter. The Russian Federation and a number of other countries have already proposed holding a briefing for the States Parties and to include all of the FFM experts—both former and current members. This proposal was denied, as one delegation saw it as a potential danger of recreating here, in The Hague, the Stalin show trials of the 1930s, with cross examinations and intimidation.

I would like to note in this regard: if the presence of representatives of Russia at this briefing frightens anyone, then that briefing can be held in a different format, for example as a separate meeting of the Director-General with the above-named experts in the presence of independent international observers.

In a word, there are options for possible actions, and we are prepared to discuss all alternatives on hand. It is important to understand that the cost of an error on the part of OPCW experts is a high one, as it can impact not only the reputation of our Organisation, but international security as a whole.

In this regard, we call upon all delegations today to express and state their opinion on how it would be possible to get out of the situation that has developed and put an end, finally, to this extremely complex issue.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I request that this statement be distributed as an official document of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

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