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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

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TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

I would like at the outset to congratulate you, Excellency Ambassador Kostov, on your assumption of the presidency of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I also wish to express our appreciation to the Technical Secretariat and its Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, for the efforts made in preparing for the Conference. My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by Mr Jaafar Hussein Zadeh, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Convention, and China.

The Syrian Arab Republic emphasises the need for serious action to achieve the universality of the Convention, and urges the OPCW to step up its efforts to invite States that are not yet parties to the Convention to join it as soon as possible and thereby ensure an effective global order against chemical weapons. Syria strongly supports the endeavours to make the Middle East region a zone free of weapons of mass destruction to achieve regional and international peace and security. This cannot, however, be achieved unless Israel is compelled to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and other international conventions relating to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, Syria has supported the convening last week in New York of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction, pursuant to the relevant decision adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its Seventy-Third Session. Syria hopes that this constitutes a step in the right direction.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls for addressing the continuous expansion of chemical terrorism, which poses real threats to the security and stability of the States Parties, by promoting counter-terrorism international efforts, focusing on effective, indiscriminate and depoliticised implementation of all provisions of the Convention, and taking a firm stance against those States which provide a cover for the crimes of terrorists. This should be carried out while taking into consideration the fact that, following their defeat on the battlefield at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army, those foreign terrorists have started to return to their countries of origin, equipped with hands-on expertise and technical capabilities in the use of chemical weapons.



The Syrian Arab Republic joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013 and has since implemented all of its obligations arising from that accession. It has completed the destruction of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities in an exemplary, unprecedented manner under difficult and complex circumstances. What has been achieved by Syria in a short period surpasses by far what has been done by the United States of America, which joined the OPCW at its inception but still drags its feet to this day when it comes to destroying its massive arsenal of chemical weapons and their production facilities and meeting its deadlines that are long overdue.

Syria reiterates its strong keenness to pursue a positive and constructive cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and its various teams, and has been committed to maintaining the momentum of the Structured Dialogue launched by the Director-General early this year. Several rounds of consultations have been held between the Syrian National Authority and the Technical Secretariat teams in Damascus and The Hague. Syria hopes that the discussions regarding all unresolved issues in the Syrian declaration will be completed in order to close those issues as soon as possible.

The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances, and categorically rejects the repeated attempts by certain States, notably the United States of America, to level groundless accusations against the Syrian Government to serve their own designs and agendas.

What is deplorable is that the U.S. Administration has prejudged the outcome of the Fact-Finding Mission investigations into alleged cases of use of chemical weapons in Syria, waged military aggressions in flagrant breach of the Charter of the United Nations, and drawn its own conclusions and verdicts, which are nothing but utter lies and an encroachment on the OPCW mandate, to say the least. Syria notices that the U.S. consistently displays that same pattern of behaviour whenever there are significant positive changes in Syria, both on the battlefield, with the terrorists being defeated, and on the political front, with progress being made in the political process. Therefore, such behaviour is part of the United States' attempts to hinder the Syrian Government's efforts towards restoring stability and security across the country, and to deceive the public opinion and find justifications and pretexts to perpetrate yet another aggression against the Syrian sovereign territory.

While Syria continues its cooperation with the Fact-Finding Mission, providing everything necessary to facilitate its work, it regrets that the Fact-Finding Mission has not complied with the provisions of the Convention, nor with the Terms of Reference governing its work. The Fact-Finding Mission has refused to visit the sites of the attacks, citing various pretexts. It has contented itself with remote investigations and relied on open-source photographs and videos fabricated by the "White Helmets" organisation, an offshoot 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.

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. The final report on the Douma incident is a clear illustration of such wrong methods. It has relied on distorting reality and scientifically invalid assumptions, ignoring other plausible and logical views. The same report has been open to several criticisms from States and even from members of the

FFM as well as from a host of international analysts, such as the “The British Working Group on Syria” and the Courage Foundation, which includes among its members José Bustani, the former Director-General of the OPCW. Ignoring the report leaked by inspector Ian Henderson, a former member of the FFM, has raised questions challenging the credibility of the FFM and its report. The letter leaked to global media outlets yesterday by another inspector who took part in the Douma investigation brings the whole report into discredit.

My delegation is the view that following those professional scandals, it is not acceptable that the FFM continues its work following the same wrong methods. Syria reaffirms that redressing those wrong methods is met with resistance from the United States of America and Western States, which aim to use the OPCW as a platform to cover their aggression against Syria.

In this regard, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its official request to the OPCW that a Fact-Finding Mission team be deployed to the areas liberated by the Syrian Arab Army from terrorist groups, in order to investigate the incidents that occurred previously there and reach real findings, instead of the previous fictitious and far-fetched findings.

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 fewer than half of the States Parties to the Convention, setting a dangerous precedent in assigning to a technical organisation issues falling within the mandate of the Security Council. Therefore, Syria, together with other States, does not recognise the legitimacy of the Investigation and Identification Team and refuses its means of funding and its access to confidential information submitted by Syrian authorities to the OPCW and the Security Council, and hence rejects any and all of its future outcomes.

The adoption of the OPCW budget for 2020 is of particular importance as it arouses serious concerns that should have been taken into consideration by the co-facilitators. Adding to the complexity of the issue was the move to halt negotiations and opt for a proposal encompassing all budget items, despite awareness of the existing contentious items relating to the financing of the so-called “Investigation and Identification Team” from the regular budget and to the use of the 2017 cash surplus.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic calls for international cooperation against the restrictions imposed by certain States on the transfer of scientific technology for peaceful purposes to developing States, as well as against other illegitimate unilateral sanctions imposed on some States to prevent them from achieving economic and scientific development for their peoples, in a flagrant breach of the Convention and international law.

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.