



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Fourth Session
25 – 29 November 2019

C-24/NAT.55
25 November 2019
ENGLISH and RUSSIAN only

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY MR O. N. RYAZANTSEV
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
DEPUTY MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

First and foremost, Honourable Mr Chairperson, please allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the delegation of the Russian Federation on your election to this responsible post, and to express our confidence that under your management, the work of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, will proceed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, objectivity, and constructive collaboration, and that decisions will be taken in a spirit of political tolerance and based on a consensus. The Russian delegation will do its best to provide you with its utmost support.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is now in its third decade as one of the most important elements within the international system of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It ensures the resolution of two key tasks: the elimination of an entire class of weapon and the establishment of other barriers preventing the production, use, and proliferation of chemical weapons. However, these tasks can be resolved only under the conditions of comprehensive universality of the Convention, which has not yet been achieved. In this regard, we welcome the first conference that took place last week in New York on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, which we see as a significant practical step towards the development of a legally binding agreement that could contribute to achieving full universality of the Convention. It is significant that a representative of our Organisation took part in this conference.

The issue regarding the full destruction of all declared chemical weapons remains unresolved, as one State Party has yet to meet this obligation in full. We urge it to take additional efforts in order to destroy its arsenal as soon as possible.

The current situation within the OPCW gives rise to serious concern. The persistent divide within the Organisation as resulting from the politicisation of its activities and the imposition of issues outside of the legal framework of the Convention, the erosion of the mandate of the OPCW, the retreat from the practice of consensus, and the espousal of voting for illegitimate



decisions are interfering with the effective achievement of the goals and tasks of the Convention and seriously damaging the reputation of the Organisation as an independent expert body on chemical weapons.

The key element around which this divide is taking place is, of course, attribution. The decision taken in June 2018 at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference, in spite of the provisions of the Convention, to assign to the OPCW Technical Secretariat authorities to determine the perpetrators behind the use of chemical weapons, is illegitimate. This new element that was foisted upon the OPCW goes beyond the framework of the Convention and the scope of the Organisation's activities; the decision was taken in breach of the Convention, and its implementation is nothing other than interference into the exclusive authority of the United Nations Security Council.

As a totally predictable consequence of this far-from-unequivocal decision, we are now seeing problems with its implementation, in particular a lack of transparency and control by the OPCW management bodies over the work of the attribution mechanism: the Investigation and Identification Team. The States Parties still have not been familiarised with the terms of reference of this body, nor the conditions of its work, the principles for selecting incidents for investigation, or the sources and modalities of its funding.

We are categorically against allotting funds for the new attribution functions of the Secretariat. We find it unacceptable that chunks of funding are being appropriated from States Parties to finance the attribution mechanism, and that the expenses are intentionally concealed under various budget item lines. We regret to state that in this situation, some States Parties are attempting to provide for their own interests via the so-called omnibus draft decision on the Programme and Budget, while ignoring the opinion of other delegations. The Russian Federation does not agree with the extension of a special fund for IT infrastructure that is to be financed by the 2016 cash surplus. We find it unacceptable that funds that are due to be returned to States Parties from a cash surplus are being allocated without our consent. In this regard, we reaffirm that we find it unacceptable that the cash surplus that is owed back to us will be used to finance the special fund for IT infrastructure, and we request that the Secretariat take that amount into account when calculating our regular contribution for the 2020 budget. I would like to emphasise in particular that our position is not meant to leave the Organisation without a budget; we only want the budget to be put together in full compliance with the financial rules of the OPCW and other international organisations. We would draw attention to the fact that if the funds for the work of this body are sourced from "voluntary contributions", then it will mean only one thing: the hiring of Secretariat representatives by sponsors to prepare made-to-order reports. Unfortunately, all this once again confirms that the implementation of this geopolitical project is not for the benefit of the OPCW.

Questions also arise with regard to the signing of a memorandum with the so-called "International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic" in Geneva, in violation of the provisions of the Convention. This essentially has established a channel for the leakage of sensitive data outside of the Organisation in breach of its Policy on Confidentiality. The attribution team—circumventing existing norms—is attempting to obtain access to the archives in New York

established by the United Nations Security Council and the now defunct OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria. The Russian Federation is forced to take measures to protect confidential information.

As is known, this adventure with the attribution mechanism was orchestrated in order to exert pressure on Damascus. As we see it, this is exactly what the recent reports by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria are aimed at. However, a whole series of the investigations of this mission, including the most recent concerning the high-profile incident in Douma on 7 April 2018, have convinced us that the conclusions of the FFM cannot be blindly trusted.

The report that was released on Douma is essentially a distortion of reality. As became widely known, the conclusions of individual mission experts confirming the accuracy of the information of the Syrian Government and Russian military servicemen were ignored, while the opinions of certain people who were engaged externally served as the basis of the report. Does this speak to the high level of professionalism and impartiality of the OPCW's expert team, much lauded by certain countries—or does it point to something else altogether?

Attempts to get to the bottom of the matter and shine a light on the actual state of affairs have been blocked and pushed down by pseudo-legal casuistry. Our request to hold a closed briefing within the walls of the OPCW and including all experts, without exception, who were involved in the investigation of the events in Douma at any and every stage, was refused without legitimate reason. We reaffirm that this is our request.

Also denied under a fabricated pretext was our request to have the States Parties familiarised with the engineering reports of the three certain “independent experts”, which formed the basis of the conclusions of the Secretariat on the alleged aviation version of the use of chlorine in Douma. One gets the very strong impression that any and all attempts are being made to hide the truth from us.

We would also like to draw attention to the fact that the FFM's conclusions on the incident in the city of Douma give rise to doubts among a variety of truly independent experts. For instance, in October this year in Brussels, under the aegis of the Courage Foundation NGO, a meeting was held for recognised international experts in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament—the professionalism and objectivity of whom cannot be questioned—where the topic was, if I may say so, the investigation. The participants came to the conclusion that the FFM investigation was conducted in gross violation of the principles and governing documents of the OPCW, and called upon the Secretariat to take a number of steps in this regard in order to restore the good name and authority of the Organisation. Anyone who wishes to do so may view this information, which is publicly available on the Internet.

We are convinced that it is now necessary to introduce some fundamental reforms to the Syrian mission and correct its “terms of reference”, which do not meet today's needs. Clearly, in order to conduct quality investigations, Secretariat experts must personally visit the sites of alleged chemical incidents, and the collection of evidence must be conducted in compliance with chain-of-custody procedures. One must take care with the individual members of the mission team, the majority of whom are from countries with a confirmed anti-Syrian bent.

The Syrian Government regularly provides the Secretariat with information on the activity of terrorist and extremist groups on its territory that have access to toxic chemicals. This information is simply ignored in the OPCW. It is necessary to activate the Organisation's mediated anti-terrorist potential, to consider the concrete measures that can be taken to counter the challenges and threats of chemical terrorism, and not only in Syria and the Middle East, but beyond that region as well.

We believe that the problems identified can in fact be resolved with the political will to do so among the members of the OPCW. Once again, we call for restoring the solidarity of this Organisation, and getting back to work based on the principle of consensus.

In our work here, we will come across the adoption of two draft decisions on introducing changes to the Annex on Chemicals, one of which was prepared by Russia, and the other by the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands. The Russian side and its Western partners have done a lot of work, and we are close to a successful outcome. We expect that both proposals will be supported with a consensus.

One positive is the initiative from the Non-Aligned Movement and China on establishing a platform for discussions to address issues on which a consensus may be achieved. We support this constructive idea, and we expect the necessary decisions will be taken on the matter.

Included among long-outstanding issues is the implementation of Article XI of the Convention, which provides for putting into place extensive international cooperation in the chemical industry. The facilitation of field-specific economic and technological development should, of course, be made imperative.

In conclusion, Mr Chairperson, I would like to assure you that the Russian delegation intends to work constructively and that you can fully count on our support.

With regard to specific agenda items, the Russian delegation will make separate statements throughout the session as they are considered.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson, and I would like to request that this statement be distributed as an official document of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

--- 0 ---