

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Kateřina Sequensová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the OPCW, on the First Report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team

The Czech Republic welcomes the release of the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) tasked with attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We would like to thank the IIT for their work on the report which is remarkably detailed and precise. It confirms our full trust in the professionalism, impartiality and independence of the IIT. We would like to also thank the Director General for making arrangements to release the report on schedule even during this difficult time.

The report clearly concludes that three chemical attacks on civilian locations and a hospital in Ltamenah in March 2017 were carried out by units of the Syrian Arab Air Force. Together with previous findings of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, this brings the total of confirmed cases of chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime to seven. The Czech Republic strongly condemns this clear violation of international law.

Seven confirmed attributed cases of use of chemical weapons can only mean one thing. The Syrian Arab Republic is in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention by violating the most critical obligations of States Parties listed in Article 1. Additionally, in another violation of the Convention, Syria has not provided a complete and accurate declaration of its chemical weapons programme despite numerous calls by the international community to do so and the best efforts of the Technical Secretariat. States Parties must clearly demonstrate that these violations will not be tolerated. We must collectively act now, through the Executive Council and the Conference of States Parties, to preserve the integrity of the Convention and to uphold the rules-based international order.

Those personally responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. While the OPCW is not an international tribunal, the Czech Republic will continue to support other mechanisms and avenues aiming to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria in order to achieve justice for the victims of the use of chemical weapons.

The Hague, 16 April 2020