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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BASSAM SABBAGH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

At the outset, I wish to express to you, Excellency Ambassador Perugini, our appreciation for your ongoing work and recognise your high professionalism. My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China.

The Syrian Arab Republic supports any earnest endeavours towards achieving 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 do so at the earliest opportunity, with a view to establishing an effective global order against chemical weapons. Syria also vigorously supports the establishment of a Middle East zone, free of all weapons of mass destruction to ensure security and peace in that region. This, however, cannot be achieved unless Israel is compelled to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, and all international conventions relating to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Syrian Arab Republic continues to provide maximum cooperation to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. In this respect, it was agreed recently to extend the Tripartite Agreement for another six months to ensure that the OPCW continues to conduct its activities in Syria. It has indicated its readiness to receive a visit by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to conduct its 23rd round of consultations initially scheduled for February, but postponed at the request of the Secretariat, until a later date after the current session of the Council. It welcomes again the visit of the DAT due from 16 to 26 March, and looks forward to achieving the progress required to close outstanding issues in relation to the Syrian Declaration. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) is in the process of completing its investigations into the incidents reported by Syria in 2017 and 2018, albeit numerous concerns have been raised about its failure to adhere to the working methods set out in the Convention and its Terms of Reference.

Leaks on the FFM report on the alleged Douma incident continue to emerge with the publication of internal documents and exchange of letters among staff of the Secretariat, exposing distortion of facts and manipulation of information. The information revealed during the Security Council Arria Formula briefing on 20 January should be alarming to



all States Parties, because of the serious falsification of the Douma report, and of the external pressure exerted on the FFM members. The Technical Secretariat's response to this serious challenge leaves much to be desired. Its briefing on 6 February on the internal investigation into the breach of confidentiality in the OPCW failed to address the substance of the leaks and raised a dilemma about which is more important: confidentiality or revelation of the truth? The fact that the Technical Secretariat adamantly avoids facing the truth, by ignoring the distortion of facts and manipulation of information in the final report on the alleged Douma incident, and supporting an assessment devoid of logic and truth at the behest of the United States of America and a host of Western States to justify their aggression on Syria, shows that there is an abnormal state of affairs at the OPCW. Therefore, the Technical Secretariat urgently needs to change course and prove its impartiality, independence, and objectivity, to regain confidence in future reports to be issued by its teams.

Syria has repeatedly condemned the use of chemical weapons anywhere and under any circumstances, and constantly warned against the increasing acts of international terrorism and the risk of toxic chemicals falling into the hands of terrorist organisations of all denominations and being used as weapons. In this respect, Syria rejects the continuous attempts by certain Western States to accuse Syria of the use of chemical weapons and deplors the deliberate disregard of the information it frequently provides to the OPCW and the United Nations concerning preparations by terrorists and their sponsors to stage false-flag attacks involving the use of chemicals, and blame them on the Syrian Arab Army every time it inflicts defeat on them. In a recent example, critical information was provided concerning the transfer of toxic chemicals from Turkey to Syria and their delivery to groups sponsored by the intelligence services of the Erdogan regime in order to weaponise them in buildings used by the "White Helmets" terrorist organisation under the supervision of Turkish and American intelligence operatives, with a view to using them as weapons during the advance of the Syrian Army towards the suburbs of the Aleppo and Idlib governorates. Regrettably, such information was ignored.

The states which sponsored the establishment of the "Investigation and Identification Team", which lacks legitimacy, continue their campaign to promote the illegal action of that team. In this respect, the United States of America has launched in advance a promotional campaign of the findings to be issued in the report of that team in the capitals of some Member States of the Executive Council to further its political agendas, targeting the Syrian Arab Republic under the pretext of protecting the Chemical Weapons Convention and supporting efforts of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. It is surprising and suspicious that diplomats of the United States take it upon themselves to respond - as they allege to - "any questions that those States have concerning the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in that respect, to ensure that Member States of the Executive Council have the necessary background on the work of the IIT and dispel any confusion about the mandate of the OPCW in that regard". This American endeavour clearly proves two things: first, that the United States knows in advance the findings to be contained in the report, if it has not already sent a delegation to meet the IIT members and impose its vision thereon just as it did when the FFM report of the alleged Douma incident was being prepared. Second, it proves the United States' continuous policy of exerting pressure by instrumentalising this kind of reports to achieve its hostile objectives towards Syria.

During the briefing held by the Technical Secretariat last week, to which the Director-General has referred in his opening statement, the issue was raised of implementing paragraph 10 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5 of 2016. I wish to clarify that the

Syrian Arab Republic received, on 17 January 2020, a request from the Technical Secretariat to visit two airbases in the north and northwest of Syria. Syria informed the OPCW on 23 January 2020 that its competent authorities would assess the security situation in those two areas. However, to our surprise, another request was addressed to the Syrian Arab Republic on 27 February 2020 by the Technical Secretariat to conduct its visits based on its receipt of a positive assessment from the Office of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security in Damascus to conduct its mission. Consequently, Syria contacted the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Syria and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security in New York to enquire about the grounds for such an assessment, especially regarding the highly risky security situation in the suburbs of Hama and Latakia due to the daily attacks of terrorist groups on those areas with various weapons, including rockets, missiles, and drones. Both offices deny knowledge of such a positive assessment.

On 5 March 2020, my delegation informed the Technical Secretariat that, based on Syria's keenness to ensure the safety and security of inspectors, the prevailing security situation in the two aforementioned areas would not allow such visits. The areas are frequent targets of terrorist attacks with all means - the latest of which was on 2 March 2020, which targeted the Hmairim airport in Latakia - in addition to ongoing military operations against terrorist groups in the suburbs of Idlib, Hama, and Latakia. In this respect, the Syrian Arab Republic stresses the need to give due regard to the procedures for the assessment of the security situation in any region in Syria, which require consultation with and approval by the competent authorities in Syria in relation to the deployment of such missions, to ensure the security and safety of inspectors.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Syria's commitment to implementing all its obligations under the Convention in cooperation with the Technical Secretariat, without scepticism or preconditions, and away from the pressures and politicisation exerted by the United States of America and its allies to influence the work the OPCW.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Third session of the Executive Council and be posted on the public website of the OPCW.

Thank you.

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