

## **Statement by the Delegation of the People's Republic of China on the Issue of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team**

(The Hague, 7 July 2020)

China noted the first report issued by the Investigation and Identification Team of the Technical Secretariat. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that China always firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons for any purpose by any country, organization or individual under any circumstance, and supports the OPCW in carrying out comprehensive, objective and impartial investigation into any possible use of chemical weapons according to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and reaching conclusions that can withstand the test of time and truth.

The IIT has been controversial since its establishment. Many States Parties, including China opposed the adoption of the decision “Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use” (C-SS-4/DEC.3) which is beyond the framework of the CWC by vote from the very beginning and have concerns on the establishment of the IIT.

Firstly, the establishment of the IIT is beyond the mandate of the CWC. The CWC prescribes detailed provisions on the alleged use of chemical weapons, with Article IX and Article X setting up mechanisms, such as “investigation in cases of alleged use of chemical weapons” and “challenge inspection” to carry out investigation, and clearly defines investigation procedures and methodology. These mechanisms are aimed at clarifying and resolving any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with the CWC. The establishment of a new mechanism, the so-called investigation on attribution of the use of chemical weapons, whose mandate is beyond the purview of the CWC, undermined the authority and the effectiveness of the Convention.

Secondly, the working methodology of the IIT lacks transparency, and does not reflect the principles of comprehensiveness, objectivity, and impartiality. From the procedure point of view, the IIT did not go to the site and collect direct evidence. Rather, it only depends on collecting and assessing indirect information, such as: interviewing with the so called witnesses at a third country, receiving samples from NGOs, and consulting external experts. These practices cannot ensure the integrity and completeness of the chain of custody, are contrary to the relevant provisions of the CWC and its Verification Annex, and fail to guarantee that the conclusion of the investigation is objective, factual and impartial. The IIT's staffs are mostly from western countries. The composition of the IIT does not reflect a fair geographic distribution.

Thirdly, the verification mechanisms established by the CWC are all fact-finding in nature. The issues as to whether there is a breach of the CWC and who is the perpetrator are beyond the technical mandate of fact-finding of the Technical Secretariat, and should be considered and determined by the Executive Council in accordance with Article VIII of the CWC. Relying solely on some Secretariat's staffs to identify who is responsible for the use of CWs is inconsistent with the provision of the CWC and is beyond the purview of the CWC.

China has repeatedly called for that the issue of attribution of the use of CWs should be guided back to the framework of the CWC. As a technical organ, the Technical Secretariat should strictly follow the CWC and uphold the spirit of objectivity, impartiality and independence to do its job well. The PMOs such as the Executive Council shall play its due role, based on facts, in a spirit of seeking truth from facts, and fully discuss the report and address it in accordance with the relevant provisions of the CWC. China calls up that all States Parties could bridge the differences through dialogue, properly handle the issue of the chemical weapons in Syria, and jointly safeguard the authority and seriousness of the CWC.