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ITALY

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ANDREA PERUGINI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY TO THE OPCW
IN RESPONSE TO THE FIRST REPORT BY THE OPCW INVESTIGATION AND
IDENTIFICATION TEAM**

Mr Director-General,
Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

Since the creation of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) mechanism in 2014 by the Director-General, H.E. Uzuncu, there have been numerous cases of chemical weapons use in Syria certified by the OPCW inspectors.

Today, for the first time in the history of the Organisation, the Executive Council, the only competent body in the multilateral arms control and disarmament arena entitled by Article VIII with the prerogative to assess compliance with the CWC, is called to declare that a State Party to the OPCW has breached the Convention.

This is possible thanks to the impartial, independent, and professional work carried out by the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) under the guidance of the Director-General, whom Italy has always supported since its creation, and which we thank for their unswerving commitment.

In its first report, the IIT concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that units from the Syrian Arab Air Force were responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Ltamenah on 24, 25, and 30 March 2017. In particular, the sarin attacks on 24 and 30 March 2017 caused several casualties which proves that, contrary to what was declared by SAR in 2014, not all sarin produced by Syria was declared and destroyed. This implies that the SAR has retained expertise from its previous chemical weapons programme as well as some chemical weapons, and that it has preserved the capability to produce and use chemical weapons, in contravention of its international and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) obligations.

Therefore, the IIT's first report confirms, once again, the conclusions of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) that we have been hearing all along over the last three years at least. Notably, that the Secretariat remains unable to resolve all of the identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration, and therefore cannot fully verify that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Convention.



It appears that, based upon the IIT's first report, we have moved beyond such a previous, prolonged uncertainty, in the sense that we are now faced with indisputable evidence that the Syrian regime has been found to be in breach of the Convention and that, in addition, the actual perpetrators have been clearly identified. The IIT's conclusions are thus forcing us to face the prospect that several significant articles of the CWC have been violated, notably Articles I, III, and possibly VII.

We are also aware of the potential, wide-reaching implications and consequences of the conclusions drawn by the IIT report, which go beyond the scope and competence of the CWC since they call into question aspects that have a bearing on individual, legal, and criminal responsibility, on personal liability, as well as on the accountability of the perpetrators for committing crimes pursuable under other instruments of international law.

Supporting the IIT's activities as well as the OPCW is a duty for all States Parties that have signed and ratified the CWC in good faith, not only as a legal obligation, but also because it is a moral obligation for the sake of all mankind to completely exclude the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, as a necessary step towards the achievement of the common objectives of ensuring the effective and verifiable progress towards the general and complete disarmament of such weapons of mass destruction.

This goal must remain an aspirational guideline for the international community and for the benefit of future generations to come in order to avoid and deter the reiteration of these abhorrent crimes. A robust response, by making use of all the existing and legitimate international measures, must make it possible to hold to account those responsible for using chemical weapons so as to prevent such crimes from happening again, by ensuring that no individual, no entity, and no government may be immune from accountability in these cases. We also owe it to the victims and their families.

Italy, consistent with its commitment to the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, reiterates its strong support for the Convention's mission and reaffirms its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the use of chemical weapons. All uses of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances are unacceptable, and contravene international standards and norms.

The use of chemical weapons will never be tolerated, and the end of impunity is one of the main goals for the credibility of the OPCW, one of the most successful non-proliferation regimes.