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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-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by H.E. Ambassador Fikrat Akhundov, the Permanent 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.

Since June 2018, the OPCW has been facing a serious threat to the implementation of its Convention and to its future work. This dangerous situation resulted from some States Parties, led by the United States of America, France, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, launching a campaign to convene a special session of the Conference of the States Parties, and resorting to blackmail and political pressure to issue a resolution deflecting the Convention from its noble objectives and the Organisation from its technical character. As a result, this resolution established a team called “the Investigation and Identification Team” (IIT) with diminished legitimacy, which was entrusted with a mandate inconsistent with the provisions of the Convention and the technical character of the Organisation, in a flagrant encroachment on the powers and terms of reference of the Security Council, the sole international body entitled to deal with international peace and security issues.

Unlawfully established, this team has adopted unprofessional and illegal working methods that run counter to the provisions of the Convention and international norms. It has given credence to false-flag chemical attacks staged by terrorist groups on instructions from the three States’ intelligence services, which have been forming, training, arming, and funding those groups in Syria since 2011, in order to accuse the Syrian Arab Army of using toxic chemicals as a weapon, an accusation which was echoed in the team’s report findings in relation to alleged incidents in Ltamenah in 2017.

Once again, the three States have opportunistically seized on the suitable conditions they have long sought to create, and lobbied the Executive Council at its Ninety-Fourth Session to issue a decision based on an unsubstantiated finding resting on probability assumption, making use of all means of blackmail and pressure on Member States to achieve their evil political purposes against Syria. They managed to impose unrealistic requirements that are impossible to fulfil within forced timeframes.



Worse still, for fear of scandal, those States blocked any scientific and technical discussion of the report, given that Syria and Russia had submitted national reports including a comprehensive technical and legal study debunking all false accusations cited in the IIT report. This sabotaging behaviour, which has been constantly pursued by the three States, has further aggravated schism among Member States, pushed for more polarisation, and given terrorist groups the green light to carry on with their crimes against the Syrian people.

Once again, Syria reiterates its categorical denial of using any toxic chemicals in Ltamenah or in any other Syrian city or village, and reaffirms that the Syrian Arab Army does not possess and has never used such weapons.

In September 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic declared all its chemical weapons stockpiles and chemical weapons production facilities, which were subsequently destroyed with broad international engagement, and under the oversight of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW, which attested to the destruction process outside Syria as confirmed by the monthly reports of the Director-General of the OPCW. Therefore, Syria reiterates its categorical rejection of the tendentious scepticism campaigns promoted by a vengeful cluster of States.

In this respect, I would like to indicate that the Syrian Arab Republic has closely cooperated with the Technical Secretariat's team to complete the Syrian initial declaration and close outstanding issues therein. However, this work has been impeded since early this year by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has been postponed many times by the Technical Secretariat, which decided to suspend the activities of its teams outside of the Headquarters as from 13 March 2020. Nonetheless, Syria has continued to cooperate in preparation for consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and to engage further with the Technical Secretariat to determine a suitable date for holding such consultations. On 18 September 2020, we were informed of the decision of the Director-General to deploy the DAT to Syria to hold the twenty-third round of consultations. Syria reacted favourably and immediately welcomed the DAT visit, offering full cooperation to receive the team and make the necessary arrangements to make this round of consultations a success. It also expressed its hope to resolve all outstanding issues in the Syrian declaration. This cooperation on the part of Syria demonstrates its genuine willingness to continue its constructive cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and to close all outstanding issues.

It is noteworthy that, on 25 August 2020, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Head of the Syrian National Authority, sent a reply to the Director-General's letter dated 21 April 2020. The reply contained comprehensive technical observations and answers backed with scientific explanations in response to the DAT document attached to the aforementioned letter of the Director-General. The reply also contained two additional amendments to the initial declaration as requested by the DAT to close two relevant outstanding issues.

The Syrian Arab Republic always gives top priority to the security and safety of OPCW Technical Secretariat mission members deployed to Syria. In this regard, it notes that the security situation in the suburbs of Hama, Homs, Latakia, and Idlib remains very dangerous and continues to prevent the conduct of field visits to those areas, due to the daily attacks launched by terrorist groups, using various means and weapons, including rockets, missiles, and drones carrying explosives. Syria also emphasises the need to continue coordination with the Technical Secretariat to constantly update it on the changing security situation, and consult with it before deploying any of its teams to conduct inspections when the security situation permits. It affirms that the Syrian competent authorities are in the best position to know and assess the situation that is changing on a daily basis.

I would like now to touch upon an important issue relating to the incident of the leak in samples which were collected by the DAT during the twenty-second round of consultations in Damascus in October 2019, and which were subsequently split at the OPCW Laboratory on 28 February 2020. In this respect, my delegation finds it strange that the Technical Secretariat delayed the transfer of the samples for analysis immediately after their split, especially given the fact that they were critical and would have helped close an outstanding issue. My delegation considers that keeping those samples at the OPCW Laboratory from February until June contravenes the procedures in place and exposed the samples to damage.

During the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council, the Syrian Arab Republic requested that the Technical Secretariat provide a detailed technical report on the leak incident. As it has not received one to date, Syria reiterates the request to obtain a detailed report from the Laboratory on the scientific reasons behind the leak, determine responsibility for the Laboratory's failure to preserve the samples, hold to account those responsible for such failure, and identify the measures taken to ensure that such an error does not occur in the future. My delegation looks forward to seeing in the Director-General's eighty-third and eighty-fourth monthly reports a more elaborate explanation of the circumstances surrounding that incident.

My delegation has made repeated requests to the Technical Secretariat and the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), including during the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council, to promptly issue the reports on the incidents reported by the Syrian Arab Republic in 2017 and 2018 regarding the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups in two incidents in Khirbat Masasinah, Daraa; one incident in Qalib Al-Thawr, Al-Salamiyah; one incident in Yarmouk, Damascus; and one incident in Al-Balil, Hama. In this respect, my delegation expresses its deep concern at the double-standard approach followed by the FFM in its work; for, while it rushes to investigate and report on allegations based on open-source information, without any tangible evidence or legitimate chain of custody for samples, against the requirement of the Verification Annex and the FFM's own terms of reference, it would drag its feet when the Syrian Government requests an investigation into an incident where terrorists use toxic chemicals. It also downplays the data submitted, including tangible evidence, testimonies, medical records, and police reports. In this context, I specifically refer to the FFM investigation into the incident of chemical weapons use in Aleppo on 24 November 2018. The FFM is still procrastinating and deferring the issuance of its report on this incident, despite the notes and clarifications provided by the Syrian and Russian delegations.

The Syrian Arab Republic emphasises the need to work seriously to achieve universality of the Convention, and urges the OPCW to step up efforts to invite Israel and the States that have not yet done so to join the Convention at the earliest, with a view to establishing an effective global order against chemical weapons. It also underlines the need to make the Middle East region a zone free of weapons of mass destruction to achieve regional and international peace and security. This, however, cannot be achieved unless Israel is compelled to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and all other international conventions relating to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Syria has repeatedly warned against the serious threats resulting from the growing risk of toxic chemicals falling into the hands of—and being used as weapons by—terrorist organisations operating under various denominations. In this respect, Syria expresses its deep concern over the deliberate disregard of the information it consistently provides to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and to the relevant bodies of the United Nations, in

accordance with Resolution 1540, particularly in connection with the transfer, possession, production, and use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals by terrorist groups in North-West Syria, as well as their staging of false-flag chemical attacks to blame them on the Syrian Arab Army, particularly when the latter makes significant advances on the ground and inflicts defeat on them.

The Syrian Arab Republic underscores the importance of promoting international cooperation in the interest of all States Parties, especially in relation to the full, non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI, through the transfer of peaceful chemistry-related technology, materials and equipment for peaceful purposes. Syria calls for the removal of all discriminatory measures, such as the illegitimate unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States of America and European States against other States Parties, in contravention of the letter and spirit of the Convention. As well as violating international law, those sanctions prevent States Parties from pursuing their economic and health development, adding to the negative impact of the aggravated situation resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, my delegation underlines the keenness of the Syrian Arab Republic to continue to implement the obligations arising from its accession to the Convention and sustain its cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and the Director-General, in an atmosphere of mutual trust, commitment to the standards of impartiality and integrity, and away from the approach of pressure and politicisation pursued by well-known States to influence the work of the Organisation and use it to serve their political interests.

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

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