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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Excellency Ambassador José Trejo, Permanent Representative of Mexico, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I also wish to express our appreciation for the efforts of the Technical Secretariat and its Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, in preparing for this Conference despite the challenges and difficulties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China, and wishes to make the following remarks:

Since its accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all obligations arising from that accession and completed the destruction of its chemical weapons and their production facilities. It did so in an exemplary and unprecedented manner, under difficult and complex circumstances, while fighting a war on terrorism which engulfed the entire Syrian territory for many years. Syria's achievements clearly reflect its commitment to implementing its obligations under the Convention, while another State Party, namely the United States of America, which joined the Convention many years ago, continues to drag its feet on the destruction of its huge arsenal of chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities, well beyond the deadlines set for it by Executive Council decisions.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses the need for serious action to achieve the universality of the Convention, and urges the OPCW to redouble efforts to call upon Israel, which has not yet joined the Convention, to do so at the earliest to ensure an effective global regime against chemical weapons. Syria also supports the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, thus ensuring regional security and peace. This cannot, however, be achieved unless Israel is compelled to join all international conventions on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. Israel's repeated acts of aggression in the Middle East, particularly against the Syrian sovereignty, prove that it presents a threat to the security and stability of the region and confirm its involvement in supporting terrorist groups and in obstructing their defeat by the Syrian Arab Army.



The Syrian Arab Republic affirms its unequivocal rejection of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, under any circumstances, and anywhere. Syria asserts that it has never used any chemicals as weapons in any Syrian village or city and that it no longer possesses any chemical weapons since their destruction in 2014 as attested to by the OPCW's teams and reports. This is the plain truth. In that sense, the escalating media smear campaigns mounted by the United States of America and its Western allies spreading lies to slander Syria and mislead the public opinion will not affect Syria's determination and willingness to proceed with the implementation of its commitments.

Syria reiterates its strong keenness to pursue positive and constructive cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and its various teams, while maintaining the full momentum of the Structured Dialogue approach launched by the Director-General, despite the enormous difficulties impacting the work of the Technical Secretariat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that we will continue to work closely with the Technical Secretariat with a view to closing all outstanding issues.

The Head of the National Authority addressed a letter to the Director-General on 25 August 2020, in reply to the questions and requests of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), as attached to the Director-General's letter dated 21 April 2020. He welcomed the conduct of the twenty-third round of consultations with the DAT. The additional report on the work of the DAT during the twenty-third round of consultations indicated that several outstanding issues were closed and that many more were clarified.

Also, Syria welcomed the request by the Technical Secretariat to conduct the seventh round of inspections of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre, to collect and bring samples to the OPCW Laboratory, and to remove the remote monitoring equipment from underground facilities following the expiry of the five-year period as per the Executive Council's relevant decision. Syria has provided the Organisation's team with all the necessary facilities to carry out its mission successfully, while ensuring their security and safety. It has also granted the inspectors unfettered access to all the places they wished to inspect freely and with full cooperation from the Syrian National Authority. The preliminary inspection report indicated that no chemicals or activities prohibited under the Convention had been found.

My delegation is surprised at the continuous approach taken by some Western States to cover up the crimes of terrorist organisations and justify the acts of aggression perpetrated by a number of Western States against the sovereignty of Syrian territory under the pretext of the alleged use of chemical weapons, prejudging the outcome of any investigations by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and levelling unfounded accusations based on fabricated facts, suspicious samples provided by the White Helmets terrorist group, as well as fabricated information and false testimonies from incredible websites, such as the Syrian Archive.

On the other hand, Syria has continued to cooperate with the FFM and to provide the necessary arrangements to facilitate its work. It regrets that the FFM failed to comply with the provisions of the Convention, the requirements of the Verification Annex, and its own Terms of Reference. Syria has repeatedly expressed serious concerns about the working methods of the FFM and has formally demanded that they be reviewed and updated to reach sound conclusions and produce more professional and credible reports. Therefore, Syria regrets the issuance of several FFM reports, which failed to reflect high professionalism, technical competence, compliance with the Verification Annex, and due technical procedures for investigation.

The final report of the FFM on the Aleppo incident is a clear illustration of those wrong methods. For, while the FFM refused to conduct visits to sites targeted by terrorist attacks involving the use of chemicals as weapons by armed terrorist groups, as reported to the Organisation, it based its report on a theory which distorts reality and is scientifically invalid, in complete disregard for the information, evidence, and documentation provided by two Member States of the Organisation based on field investigation by their specialised teams confirming that an attack with chemical weapons was perpetrated in Aleppo by terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the FFM failed to prove the use of toxic chemicals, which caused over 125 civilian casualties in Aleppo on 24 November 2018, raising fundamental questions about the credibility of the FFM's work and the report at issue.

It is my delegation's view that, following the professional scandals that enveloped the reports on Douma, Ltamenah, Aleppo, and elsewhere, it is no longer acceptable to keep silent on the FFM continuing to operate according to those wrong methods. Pressure from the United States and Western States standing in the way of redressing such methods is yet another proof of the politicisation of the Organisation's work, to create polarisation and use the Organisation as a platform for implementing their own agendas, including the justification of aggression on Syrian territory.

The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its position on the illegality of the establishment of the so-called "Identification and Investigation Team" (IIT). It also reiterates its outright rejection of the IIT working mechanisms and the wrong conclusions of its report, which aimed to distort facts and accuse the Syrian air forces of using toxic chemicals in 2017 in the town of Ltamenah. Syria reiterates its categorical denial of the use of any toxic chemicals in the town of Ltamenah or any other Syrian city or village, and affirms that the Syrian armed forces do not possess and never used such weapons. Therefore, the requirements of Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2, which are based on false allegations and accusations, are unenforceable and inapplicable, both in establishing that Syria used chemical weapons and in implying that it still possesses such materials and undestroyed production facilities. As for the third requirement in the decision, i.e., the closure of outstanding issues in the report of the DAT, it is a process that is still ongoing with the Technical Secretariat. Significant progress has been achieved during the latest round of consultations with the DAT in Damascus, which helped close several issues. It may be unrealistic to complete this process within 90 days, taking into account the ongoing circumstances in the world due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Executive Council's decision deliberately ignored the two national documents submitted by Syria and Russia in response to the IIT report. The documents contained scientific clarifications illustrating the gaps and contradictions in the IIT report. A careful reading of that decision prompts us to say that those who drafted it resorted to manipulation of terminology and tried to impose a *fait accompli* to turn assumptions into established facts and accusations. At times, the drafters of the decision insinuate that Syria failed to comply with the Convention, and, at other times, the same decision distorts the truth and purpose of the ongoing technical consultations between the Syrian National Authority and the DAT as part of the technical assistance provided to Syria to resolve some outstanding issues. In this regard, Syria wishes to refer to the letter sent by the Head of the National Authority to the Director-General on 4 November 2020, which has been circulated to all States Parties. In the letter, Syria reiterated the strategic decision it has taken since joining the OPCW to dispose of all its chemical weapons, which was completed in mid-2014, and its determination to continue to cooperate with the OPCW to resolve all outstanding issues in the Syrian initial declaration as soon as possible. Syria has shown transparency by welcoming the visit of the Technical Secretariat team to the Shayrat and Hama air bases as soon as security conditions permit.

It is very unfortunate that the Organisation has fallen victim to the aggressive strategy of the United States of America and some Western States, notably France. In an exchange of roles, France had submitted the draft decision to this Conference, while the United States had been circulating it to capitals, in an attempt to accuse Syria of “non-compliance” and impose sanctions against it during the Conference. This is the first time that sanctions are taken against a State Party which fulfilled all its commitments, while no action has been taken against the United States of America, which has been stalling and delayed the destruction of its chemical arsenal from the 2012 deadline until 2023. Therefore, the Syrian Arab Republic considers the draft decision an unprecedented politicisation of the work of the Organisation and an affront against the membership of a State Party to the Convention without any legal basis.

This draft decision will give the States that had previously committed an aggression against Syria another pretext to commit new acts of aggression and cause bloodshed amongst other innocent Syrians as a result of this hostile policy. At the same time, the draft decision will encourage terrorist groups, of which not a single mention was made in it, to stage further false-flag attacks and blame them on the Syrian Army. Furthermore, the draft decision will entrench division among the Member States of the Organisation and promote further polarisation, compromising the future and role of the Organisation. The Syrian Arab Republic calls upon the States Parties that are committed to their sovereignty and their free will to reject dictates from the United States and other Western States, stand against attempts to instrumentalise this technical Organisation in a geopolitical game, and consequently reject and vote against the draft decision. This is in order to save the Organisation from further deterioration and prevent it from becoming a tool serving the interests of States with hostile political agendas that they wish to further in our region.

The information being circulated about the alleged “Navalny incident” is shrouded in confusion and lacks transparency and credibility. Also, levelling accusations before investigation and without any evidence, while refusing to establish any dialogue with Russia, is a wrong and politicised approach taken by Germany in dealing with this incident, supported by several States Parties that have been following the same usual approach in recent years in dealing with a number of States, including Syria. My delegation calls for an end to these accusations and hostile campaign of incitement against Russia, for engaging in practical and transparent cooperation with Russia in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, and for establishing an effective technical and political dialogue through diplomatic channels, as the only way to uncover the circumstances surrounding this issue. In this regard, Syria welcomes the invitation by the Russian Federation to the Technical Secretariat to conduct a technical visit.

The draft decision on the Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021 raises numerous concerns for many delegations in that it involves questions that, given their importance for many States Parties, should have been taken into account and adopted by consensus. Adding to the complexity of the matter was the clustering of all budget items in one omnibus draft decision, despite the existence of controversial items in relation to the financing of the illegitimate so-called Investigation and Identification Team from the regular budget, and the use of the 2018 cash surplus without the consent of the States Parties. In the same vein, while cuts were applied in funding to technical assistance and capacity-building programmes for developing countries, there was an increase in funding for other programmes. The Syrian Arab Republic urges all Member States to be aware of these serious concerns and work towards restoring the spirit of consensus on the adoption of the Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021.

In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic calls for international cooperation to stand against the restrictions imposed by certain States on the transfer of scientific technology for peaceful purposes to developing countries, subjecting the latter to unilateral, unlawful sanctions, and enforcing unilateral and unlawful coercive measures against others, with a view to preventing them from achieving the economic and scientific development of their peoples and from using chemistry for peaceful purposes, in clear violation of the provisions of the Convention and international law.

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

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