



# UK Delegation to the OPCW

**25<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES OF THE  
ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT  
BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

Thank you Mr Chair,

In July 2020 the Executive Council considered the findings of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team. The IIT's report found that Syria had used chemical weapons on three separate occasions in Ltamenah in March 2017. The Council condemned the use of chemical weapons and set out clearly what Syria needed to do in order to come into compliance. Syria has failed to respond.

The Executive Council also recommended that the Conference take action, in line with Article XII of the Convention. That is the task before us today.

Syria is required to cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat, including under the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 2118 - but has not done so.

Syria's 2014 chemical weapons declaration was only a partial disclosure. The declaration has been amended 17 times, in response to incontrovertible evidence presented by OPCW inspectors. The omissions were not mere oversights. To date they have included one chemical weapons production facility, four laboratories, five previously undeclared chemical warfare agents, hundreds of tons of chemicals, and thousands of munitions.

Since providing its initial declaration the Syrian regime has gone on to use chlorine and sarin as chemical weapons. In Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April 2017 an aerial bomb filled with sarin was dropped from a Syrian Su-22 aircraft. At least 90 people were killed, including 30 children.

Sarin attacks by the Syrian Arab Air Force were also carried out in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017. Detailed chemical analysis, shared with us all by the IIT, shows that the sarin used had unique identifiers matching information provided by Syria in their declaration.

The draft decision before us today is a proportionate response to the Syrian regime's repeated breaches of the Convention. By adopting this decision the Conference will be acting to strengthen the integrity of the Convention and incentivise Syria to complying with its legal obligations.

The draft decision is clear that as soon as Syria complies with the measures laid out by the Executive Council Syria's rights and privileges will be reinstated.

We have heard that Syria needs more time. But how long - we are now in the eighth year since Syria's accession to the Convention. The Declaration Assessment Team has confirmed that 19 issues remain outstanding in Syria's declaration.

We have also heard that the IIT reports cannot be trusted. In each of its investigations the IIT has been meticulous in setting out the methodologies used; the alternative explanations which were considered and discounted for lack of evidence; and the standard of proof that was applied. In every case the IIT has started from first principles.

The Investigation and Identification Team's latest report, released on 12 April, has found that there were reasonable grounds to believe Syria carried out another chlorine attack, this time in Saraqib in February 2018. Specialist international investigations have now confirmed eight separate cases of Syrian regime use of chemical weapons.

Syria continues to deny ever using chemical weapons and to blame staged or fake attacks, as well as terrorist use. The Syrian regime has made almost two hundred allegations of imminent terrorist attacks but, as confirmed by the Technical Secretariat in March, presented no evidence to support these claims. It is for Syria to take the necessary steps to resolve the outstanding issues with its Declaration and to meet the full range of commitments under the Convention.

This Conference must decide how to respond to the fact of Syria's failure to meet its obligations under the Convention. The draft Decision before us is a measured response. It enables the Conference to uphold the provisions of the Convention and the integrity of the OPCW, on whom we all depend for our collective security. The weight of evidence simply cannot be ignored and we must ensure that those responsible bear the cost of their actions.

Thank you Mr Chair.



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Mr Chair,

It is just over three years since the first confirmed use of a Novichok nerve agent as a chemical weapon. That attack took place in the United Kingdom, with deadly consequences. Last August, to our horror, the world witnessed a similar attempted assassination, this time of a prominent Russian opposition figure, Alexei Navalny. That Mr Navalny survived the attack is undoubtedly due to the swift reactions of the aircrew, and medical team in Omsk hospital who administered atropine – well known as a nerve agent antidote - and provided essential life support.

Any poisoning with a nerve agent constitutes the use of a chemical weapon and is banned under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons therefore has a very clear interest in this case. Independent analysis by two Designated Laboratories confirmed that it was indeed a Novichok nerve agent which was used in the attack on Mr Navalny. The evidence is undeniable. The attack took place on Russian territory and according to press reports, one of those responsible has confirmed the details of the attack directly to Mr Navalny.

That Russia maintains a secret chemical weapons programme can no longer be credibly denied. In the 1980s the Soviet Union developed a new class of 'fourth generation' nerve agents, known as Novichoks. A branch of the State Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology at Shikhany near Volgograd led the development of these weapons. The codeword for the offensive chemical weapons programme (of which Novichok were one part) was FOLIANT. It is highly likely that Novichoks were developed in order to circumvent international chemical weapons controls. Long after signing and ratifying the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks. Russia has a track record of state sponsored assassinations both inside and outside the former Soviet Union.

We are now seeing a sadly familiar pattern of behaviour following the identification of this chemical weapon attack. Rather than answering legitimate questions about what took place, Russia is attacking the OPCW Technical Secretariat for doing its job and once again is concocting increasingly bizarre conspiracy theories. Just as it did following the Novichok attack in Salisbury, when the Russian Federation

promoted over 40 contradictory narratives, none of which were supported by evidence.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom welcomes the Director-General's efforts to provide technical assistance, as requested, to Germany and the Russian Federation in accordance with Article VIII of the Convention. In 2018 the United Kingdom benefitted from such assistance and – like Germany - was able to swiftly comply with the standard requirements for such visits to take place. We can see from the published correspondence between the Director-General and the Russian Federation that Russia has sought to impose impossible conditions on their request for technical assistance; such as having any laboratory analysis conducted in a Russian laboratory rather than by independent OPCW Designated Laboratories. Standard practice and legal requirements apply equally to all States Parties to the OPCW.

Having thrown up barriers to OPCW engagement for months, the Russian Federation has now effectively cancelled its request for technical assistance. Russia has still to provide a clear explanation for how a prominent opposition figure came to be attacked with a deadly nerve agent on Russian soil. There can be no impunity for those who use chemical weapons in violation of international treaty obligations.

Thank you Mr Chair.