

**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL****PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISION C-SS-4/DEC.3
ON ADDRESSING THE THREAT FROM CHEMICAL WEAPONS USE**

1. The Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”), at its Fourth Special Session, adopted a decision entitled “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use” (C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018). In paragraph 24 of the decision, the Conference decided that “the Director-General shall provide a copy of this decision and a report on its initial implementation to all States Parties and to the United Nations Secretary-General within 30 days of this decision and thereafter provide a report on progress to each regular session of the Council”, in reference to the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”).
2. In furtherance of paragraph 7 of the decision, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) has continued its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic to clarify all gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies noted in its initial declaration and subsequent submissions.
3. A report by the Director-General on the recent activities of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) entitled “Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team” (EC-97/HP/DG.1, dated 30 June 2021), was noted by the Council at its Ninety-Seventh Session. In that report, the Secretariat concluded that, at this stage, considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”), Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 (dated 27 September 2013), and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).
4. On 9 July 2021, the Syrian National Authority sent the Secretariat a note verbale in which it reported an attack that took place on 8 June 2021 and targeted a military facility that housed a declared former chemical weapons production facility. The Syrian National Authority also reported the destruction in the attack of, inter alia, two chlorine cylinders related to the chemical weapons incident that took place in Douma, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018.
5. Through a note verbale dated 15 July 2021, the Secretariat requested further information and documentation regarding the damage caused to the declared site, given that it is related to one outstanding issue recently opened by the DAT.



6. The Secretariat further recalled that during its previous inspection of the aforementioned cylinders in November 2020, the cylinders had been stored and inspected at another declared site approximately 60 km from the location at which they were reportedly destroyed on 8 June 2021.
7. The Secretariat further recalled that it had previously requested the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure the safe and secure storage of the two cylinders and to maintain them in a secure facility, and had reminded the Syrian Arab Republic that it was not to open, move, or alter the containers or their contents in any way without seeking the prior written consent of the Secretariat. The Syrian National Authority did not notify the Secretariat that the cylinders had been moved to a new location until it reported their destruction.
8. Accordingly, in its note verbale dated 15 July 2021, the Secretariat requested the Syrian Arab Republic to, inter alia, provide all relevant information regarding the movement of the two cylinders and to gather, preserve, and document the current status of any remains of the two cylinders available on site, and to share this information with the Secretariat at the earliest opportunity. As at the date of this report, the Secretariat had not received a response to these requests. The Secretariat will keep the Council informed of further developments on this matter.
9. On 9 August 2021, the Secretariat informed the Syrian National Authority by letter of its intention to deploy the DAT to the Syrian Arab Republic from 2 to 17 September 2021 in order to conduct the twenty-fifth round of consultations. This followed two previous communications by the Secretariat (dated 30 April 2021 and 14 May 2021) regarding possible deployment dates, to which the Syrian Arab Republic did not respond. Through a note verbale dated 16 August 2021, the Syrian National Authority stated that it welcomed the upcoming round of consultations. However, the Syrian authorities requested that the forthcoming round of consultations be held in October 2021, five months after the initial dates proposed by the Director-General.
10. In its response dated 25 August 2021, the Secretariat informed the Syrian National Authority that the DAT was prepared to deploy in October 2021. The Secretariat further noted with concern that delays in the conduct of the consultations impact both the compliance of the Syrian Arab Republic with its obligations under the Convention, and the implementation of the Secretariat's mandate as established by the OPCW's policy-making organs. Moreover, the Secretariat reiterated its request to the Syrian National Authority to submit, ahead of the upcoming deployment, information relevant to a number of outstanding issues that had been requested on multiple previous occasions.
11. On 3 September 2021, the Syrian Arab Republic informed the Secretariat in a note verbale of its agreement to hold the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the DAT in October 2021. However, the Syrian Arab Republic has not approved entry visas for all members of the DAT. In its response dated 13 September 2021, the Secretariat informed the Syrian National Authority that the refusal of visas for any Secretariat experts would hamper the ability of the DAT to deploy. As at the date of this report, the Secretariat was still waiting for the issuance of all visas for the DAT team, in order to finalise deployment preparations.

12. Consistent with paragraph 8 of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, and following current practice, the Secretariat continues to update States Parties on the operations of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) through the monthly progress report entitled “Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme”, and through reports detailing the FFM’s activities and findings regarding specific incidents of alleged use of chemicals as a weapon in the Syrian Arab Republic.
13. Pursuant to paragraph 10 of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat established the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic by identifying and reporting on all information potentially relevant to the origin of those chemical weapons in those instances in which the FFM determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, and cases for which the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) has not issued a report. The IIT is continuing its investigations in accordance with the Note entitled “Work of the Investigation and Identification Team Established by Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 (Dated 27 June 2018)” (EC-91/S/3, dated 28 June 2019) and will issue further reports in due course, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.
14. The voluntary funding requirements for 2021 for the IIT of EUR 1.3 million, as specified in the Programme and Budget for 2021 (C-25/DEC.7, dated 1 December 2020) have been met. Contributions and pledges have been received from Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the European Union.
15. On 19 July 2021, 4 August 2021, and 10 August 2021, the Secretariat sent notes verbales requesting the Syrian Arab Republic to issue a visa for the incoming team leader to deploy to the OPCW’s command post in Damascus. The Secretariat initially requested a visa that would be valid as of 4 August 2021, to correspond with the departure of the deployed team leader, which had been planned for 11 August 2021. As was already the case in the period between 17 April and 5 July 2021, the Secretariat did not receive any response to its requests. The Director-General therefore authorised the departure of the deployed team leader from Damascus as scheduled on 11 August 2021. This left the command post with only support staff from the United Nations Office for Project Services for the second time this year, until 1 September 2021 when the OPCW’s presence could be resumed following the issuance of a visa for the incoming staff member. The absence of an OPCW command post officer in Damascus impairs the ability of the Secretariat to deploy missions, including those of the DAT and the FFM.
16. In continuation of its regular briefings to States Parties on chemical weapons-related activities in the Syrian Arab Republic, on 30 June 2021 the Secretariat provided States Parties with a presentation to inform them of the status of the Secretariat’s mandated activities in the Syrian Arab Republic pertaining to the full elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The Secretariat will continue to keep States Parties informed of activities and progress with regard to the Syrian chemical weapons programme through existing reporting modalities and, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on OPCW activities, through briefings.

17. Pursuant to paragraph 12 of C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat has put in place appropriate measures to preserve and provide information to the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (IIIM), the body established by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 71/248 (2016). All transfers of information to the IIIM are being implemented in a manner consistent with the OPCW's rules and policies on confidentiality.
18. In accordance with paragraph 18 of C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat is developing options for further assistance to States Parties to help prevent the chemical weapons threat posed by non-State actors, and to aid States Parties' contingency planning in the event of a chemical weapons attack. Taking into consideration, inter alia, the decision of the Council entitled "Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors" (EC-86/DEC.9, dated 13 October 2017), the Secretariat is building on existing activities related to preparedness, prevention, and response.
19. Despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat is continuing its capacity-building support during this period through the use of online platforms or similar means to enable States Parties to sustain their engagement, including in support of their preparedness, prevention, and response capacity.
20. Pursuant to paragraph 20 of C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Director-General, if requested by a State Party investigating possible chemical weapons use on its territory, can provide technical expertise to identify those who were perpetrators, organisers, sponsors, or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons. Accordingly, the Secretariat is working to ensure that it has the necessary capabilities to respond to such requests.
21. As reported previously, the Secretariat has been implementing a series of capacity-building measures to expand the existing skills of relevant Secretariat staff. These measures include, inter alia:
 - (a) training to further build investigative capabilities in areas such as crime scene management, witness interviews, evidence collection, and forensics;
 - (b) the revision of job descriptions with more generic requirements regarding scientific background in order to attract a larger pool of candidates, including those that may have skills and expertise applicable to activities under paragraph 20 of C-SS-4/DEC.3;
 - (c) internal review and identification of additional investigative tools and capabilities that could be useful for the Secretariat, if called to assist a State Party in identifying perpetrators, organisers, sponsors, or otherwise, of chemical weapons use on its territory; and
 - (d) the procurement of relevant software and equipment.
22. In furtherance of paragraph 23 of C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat will continue to prioritise the realisation of the universality of the Convention, on the understanding that this goal is essential to achieving its object and purpose, to enhancing the security of States Parties, and to international peace and security. The Director-General continues to call upon all States Parties to support the Secretariat's efforts in this regard.