



**OPCW**

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**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOSEPH MANSO  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION  
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES  
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 9(D)**

Mr Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

During this sitting of the Conference of the States Parties, we will consider a decision on “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic,” that would take action on the recommendation made by the Executive Council in its July 2020 decision, adopted in response to three confirmed uses of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic. I would like us to look back at how we got to this decision point.

Last month marked the tenth anniversary of the Syrian uprising. In March 2011, the people of the Syrian Arab Republic took to the streets to demand better from their leaders. Instead of heeding its citizens’ calls for reform, the Assad regime unleashed a wave of increasingly brutal repression that led to the killing of more than 500,000 Syrians and forced an estimated 13 million people—over half of Syria’s pre-war population—from their homes.

In late 2012, the Assad regime increased its already brutal assault against its own people with the barbaric use of chemical weapons. This use escalated with the horrific sarin attack in Ghouta in August 2013, which indiscriminately killed 1,400 innocent people. After near universal condemnation for the attack, the Syrian Government, fearing for its very survival, agreed to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) and give up its chemical programme under international verification.

The Syrian Arab Republic’s accession to the Convention, however, did not mean an end to their use of chemical weapons, nor did it mean the Syrian Arab Republic unequivocally abandoned its chemical weapons programme. Quite to the contrary, the regime continues to use chemical weapons, and its initial declaration continues to raise serious questions about its completeness and accuracy. In short, the Syrian Arab Republic is not abiding by the Convention. In fact, the United States of America assesses that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons at least 50 times on its own people since joining the Convention and that it retains sufficient chemicals—specifically sarin and chlorine—and expertise from its traditional chemical weapons programme to continue to use sarin, to continue to produce and deploy chlorine munitions, and to continue to develop new chemical weapons. The Syrian military



also has a variety of chemical-capable munitions, including grenades, aerial bombs, and improvised munitions, that it can continue to use with little to no warning.

Now, while this context is important to keep in mind, the decision before the Conference today focuses on a much narrower but indisputable set of facts meticulously documented by the impartial and professional staff of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), a body created pursuant to a decision by the Conference in 2018 to identify the perpetrators of cases of use or likely use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The IIT confirmed that in March 2017, the Syrian Air Force carried out three separate chemical weapons strikes, two using sarin and one using chlorine, in the town of Ltamenah, Syrian Arab Republic. Most recently the IIT issued another report last week confirming that in February 2018, the Syrian Air Force carried out a chemical weapons attack using chlorine in the town of Saraqib, Syrian Arab Republic. These four cases of confirmed chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime are in addition to the four cases previously attributed to the Syrian Arab Republic by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. Sadly, we expect more cases to be attributed to the Syrian Arab Republic as the IIT continues its work.

In view of the IIT's findings, and as it is empowered to do under the Convention, the Executive Council adopted in July 2020 a decision condemning the Syrian Arab Republic for its now repeatedly and comprehensively documented possession and use of chemical weapons and setting out clear measures for the Syrian Government to take, to redress the situation within a set timeline. The Syrian Arab Republic, however, failed to complete any of those measures, as reported by the Director-General in October 2020. As such, the Executive Council decision recommended that the Conference adopt a decision that undertakes appropriate action, pursuant to paragraph 2 of Article XII of the Convention. Consistent with that recommendation, this Conference now has before it a decision that takes action, pursuant to the Convention, to suspend the Syrian Arab Republic's rights and privileges under the Convention. Some States Parties will try to claim that the process that led to this decision is flawed and marred with irregularities or argue baselessly that the decision under consideration is illegitimate and contrary to the Convention. These same arguments have been made each time the Syrian Arab Republic is called out for its actions contrary to its obligations under the Convention. And each time, States Parties have taken action to move forward based on the irrefutable facts, as we are instructed to do under the Convention.

Most recently, during the March meeting of the Executive Council, the Syrian Arab Republic levelled a new line of accusations against the OPCW – that the measures set out in the July 2020 Executive Council decision were unprecedented and that the Syrian Arab Republic was being treated unfairly and somehow victimised by this institution. So brazen was this attempt to tarnish the reputation of the OPCW that the next day, the Director-General felt the need to respond. He highlighted that the Syrian Arab Republic has amended its initial declaration 17 times, including the addition of a chemical weapons production facility, four chemical weapons research sites, five chemical warfare agents and several thousand large calibre chemical weapons munitions, all previously undeclared. The Director-General also reminded the Executive Council that after seven years and 24 rounds of consultation with the Syrian Arab Republic, 19 declaration discrepancies remained unanswered, and the Declaration Assessment Team still cannot conclude that the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration is complete and accurate. Let me be clear, the Syrian Arab Republic is not being treated differently because it is the victim of some ill-intentioned cabal. It is being treated differently because the Syrian Arab Republic clearly and brazenly violated its obligations under the Convention. The Decision before the Conference recommends appropriate action; action that the Convention itself, in

Article 12 paragraph 2, instructs the Conference to take in response to this exact situation; action that is long overdue for the Syrian Arab Republic's continued chemical weapons atrocities since acceding to the Convention in 2013; and action that must be taken in order to uphold the strength and credibility of the Convention, the OPCW, and this Conference of the States Parties itself.

The United States trusts that this body, with all the facts in hand, will take action to adopt the proposed decision. It is our duty to act today to protect our collective security and make clear that the Syrian Arab Republic's actions are not acceptable and, in doing so, uphold the international norm against the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone. There can be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Conference session and posted on both the external server and the public website.

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