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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A.V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE
OPCW AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Mr Chairperson,

This is the first session of the Executive Council since the election of Abdelouahab Bellouki, the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco, as Chairperson. Allow me, Mr Ambassador, to congratulate you on your appointment and wish you every success. I would like to assure you of our full support and readiness to work constructively. It is my hope that, thanks to your many years of diplomatic experience, we will be able to take steps to lead the OPCW out of the protracted crisis in which it has found itself.

We can also see that with a steady increase in the number of people vaccinated against the coronavirus, the Government of the Netherlands is gradually lifting various restrictions. In this regard, we would like to believe that future meetings and the Conference of the States Parties will proceed more or less as normal and, most importantly, with the participation of specialists from the capitals who provide much needed expert support.

Let us now turn directly to the subjects of this session of the Council. Of course, we cannot help but be concerned about what is happening in The Hague in terms of attribution. All the activities of the special branch of the Technical Secretariat—the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT)—are being conducted covertly, behind closed doors. As before, we refuse to accept this. The IIT was established in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in effect by what was essentially a minority vote and in circumvention of international law, and its activities encroach upon the exclusive authorities of the United Nations Security Council.

The IIT produces reports that are questionable when it comes to common sense and scientific and technical facts, drawing conclusions along the lines of “there are reasonable grounds to believe”. Based on these conclusions, a vote was forced through to impose deliberately unrealistic requirements upon Syria, followed by a decision to suspend its rights. An extremely dangerous precedent was set by which any State that is a fully-fledged member of the Convention may be subjected to obstruction based on the unsubstantiated conclusions made by the body established in circumvention of the provisions of the Convention.



Furthermore, these reports are based on the conclusions made by another special mission of the Technical Secretariat: the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the work methods of which also raise a number of questions. We believe it extremely important that this structure should act in strict compliance with the provisions of the Convention's Verification Annex and the fundamental principles of the OPCW. We call for the working methods of the FFM to be brought into line with the provisions of the Convention and for a possible revision of its terms of reference, which were agreed upon some time ago bilaterally between the Technical Secretariat and Damascus.

The cooperation between the authorities in Damascus and the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) should not deviate from its purely technical nature. One cannot ignore Damascus' full readiness to work closely in this format. Focusing solely on the negative aspects not only fails to reflect reality, but also prevents us from effectively tackling our common challenges. It is necessary to focus on the expedited resolution of "override" issues for which there do not appear to be any prospects for complete resolution. All the more so because the demands placed on Syria extend far beyond the obligations of the States Parties to the Convention.

Some States Parties take advantage of the controversial nature of these issues, doing everything to perpetuate the divide in the OPCW or even exacerbate it, as they wish to continue to use the Organisation for their own geopolitical interests. This kind of destructive stance and politicised agenda imposed by any and all means have nothing to do with the predominantly technical nature of this Organisation.

We would like to thank Director-General Fernando Arias for his participation in the United Nations Security Council meeting on resolution 2118. We hope that this practice will continue. At the same time, we cannot help but note that in his statement, which shone a light on the work of the OPCW's special missions, the Director-General allowed a number of inaccuracies, to put it mildly. In particular, when he assured the United Nations Security Council that none of the 193 States Parties to the Convention disputed the FFM's conclusion that chlorine was found at the site of the attack in the Syrian town of Douma, he at the same time said that all of the members of the Executive Council approved the report on this chemical incident.

However, in order to establish whether a chemical attack really took place, what is important is not whether or not chlorine was there, but how it got there in the first place.

Going forward, we would call for avoiding such mistakes so as not to mislead the United Nations Security Council.

I would also like to say the following on the subject of attribution. As we know, the traditional process of agreeing on a budget document will soon begin. This time will be the first that we consider it within the context of the decision to transition to a biennial financial cycle. We urge the Technical Secretariat to listen to different opinions and return to the practice of preparing separate draft decisions. This applies both to the IIT, the funding for which is spread across the so-called "omnibus" document, just like, for example, the cash surplus. These types of issues for which there is not a consensus should be singled out so that all delegations can express their specific views on them. At present, the States Parties have no possibility to express their position on certain aspects and have to vote on the budget as a whole, while certain items raise serious questions, even though most of the budget enjoys consensus support.

The application of the informal consultations algorithm to item 9 of agenda for this session of the Council—the draft report of the OPCW on the implementation of the Convention in 2020—gives rise to major doubts. It is our view that given the rather difficult situation observed within the Organisation over the course of recent years, documents of this kind require thorough consideration both at the Executive Council and at the Conference before approval.

As you know, while taking the decision on the appointment of a new External Auditor for the OPCW at the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Convention, it was agreed that the Council should establish, as early as possible, a working group to develop modalities for determining the best candidate for the position in the future. We thank the Ambassador of Mexico for his initiative. We are convinced that its implementation will make an important contribution to the work of the Organisation. We support this activity and intend to play an active role in this group's work.

We believe that the amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF) proposed by the co-sponsors are far from finding a consensus. We view the proposed amendments as an attempt to subordinate the activities of the independent body and control it. We believe that the early withdrawal of the appointment of an ABAF member can only be done either by the member himself or by the State that nominated him. The proposed amendments only aggravate the already tense atmosphere within the Organisation. We call on the co-sponsors to withdraw this issue from the agenda.

We would also like to share our vision of the tenure policy of the Organisation within the context of the proposed decision. As we understand it, there is a very wide range of opinions on the draft decision being put forward. As we see it, no consensus has been reached yet. In our view, the initiative needs to be further elaborated at this point. It is important to strike a careful balance between preserving and strengthening the expertise of the OPCW and greater geographical representation, without leaning only towards certain countries. In this regard, we believe that it would be advisable to take things slowly and continue the discussion, naturally with due account of the views of all the delegations in order to reach a mutually acceptable result.

As for the other items on the agenda, the Russian delegation will make statements at this session as the respective agenda items are addressed.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Seventh Session of the Executive Council and published on the Organisation's extranet and website.

Thank you for your attention.

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