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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY MS RANIA ALRIFAIY
CHARGÉ D’AFFAIRES OF THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

First of all, 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, delivered on behalf of the Group by His Excellency Ambassador Fikrat Akhundov, Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the OPCW.

The Syrian Arab Republic, which acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention following its strategic decision in 2013, has implemented all its obligations to dispose of all that it was required to dispose of by virtue of that accession. It has cooperated fully and closely with the Technical Secretariat to implement all ensuing obligations, and requested the Organisation’s assistance in drafting its initial declaration, as it lacked the required expertise at the time. Syria implemented its obligations in an exemplary and unprecedented manner under difficult and complicated circumstances, as documented in the reports by the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat. It exceeded by far States which joined the Organisation since its inception but are until this day dragging their feet in the destruction of their massive chemical weapons arsenal and production facilities. Like other States, Syria also faced problems with its initial declaration. One of those States declared a facility for the production of a pure chemical agent 19 years after joining the OPCW, announcing simply the end of operations in that facility because “it was not aware of the obligations under the Convention”. This State, however, was not subjected to the same political manipulation, double standards, and discrimination that Syria has suffered. It continues to submit amendments to its initial declaration to this day, without that being considered an indication of “its failure to implement its obligations under the Convention” and without “the Secretariat making new discoveries”! This happens at a time when the United States continues, under many pretexts, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to possess the largest chemical weapons arsenal worldwide, which poses a danger to all peoples and States of the world and represents a tool for threatening international peace and security.

Syria expected that the OPCW would cooperate with it and assess positively the work it has been undertaking. Instead, the OPCW has turned into a tool for exerting pressure and levelling baseless accusations against Syria. Everything said by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) was interpreted by States in an unscientific way that serves their well-known agendas, basing on those interpretations many conclusions. They levelled fictitious accusations regarding many technical issues, anticipating the outcome of the lengthy scientific and technical consultations, which are still ongoing between the Syrian National Authority and the DAT.



We noted that the DAT presents a specific hypothesis and strives to prove it, ignoring all the information provided by the Syrian side. It moves, even before the end of discussions, to confirming categorically the existence of a pure chemical agent at one of the sites. The Director-General is demanding us to declare this site as a production site used for production and/or weaponisation. In its initial declaration, Syria had declared that the site had never been used to produce chemical weapons. The Syrian side explained that the existence of a chemical in no way means the existence of a prohibited chemical activity at that site. Lengthy technical discussions were held with the DAT on the matter. The Syrian side explained the reasons for the existence of such sample/samples, and technical consultations on the issue are still under way with the DAT. Nevertheless, the choice was made to shine the spotlight exclusively on this matter in the last few months, amid a mounting campaign against Syria to lay the ground for the adoption of decision C-25/DEC.9. This campaign continues to this day. Much space is dedicated to a single issue among many others to support the claim by some States that Syria is hiding something, although the DAT has taken many samples from the site over several years with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Syrian State. If Syria had something to hide, it would not have allowed the DAT to visit the site repeatedly and take samples time and again.

The second new issue, which the DAT added to the outstanding issues, is the one included in the Director-General's ninety-first and ninety-second monthly reports, although the issue is still under scientific and technical discussion. The Syrian National Authority provided the Technical Secretariat with an initial response on this issue, pending the continuation of discussions during the upcoming round of consultations.

It has become clear that, no matter how much information is provided by Syria, the file of the outstanding issues will not be closed. Instead, the intention is to increase the number of outstanding issues every time the DAT visits Syria, since the instructions given to the team require that this file remain open.

Syria has cooperated with the Technical Secretariat and its various teams and was keen to move forward with full strength. Despite the inhumane coercive unilateral measures imposed on it and the challenges caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, Syria has dealt with the Technical Secretariat's teams with full sincerity and openness and in good faith, often in difficult security circumstances. This was reflected by Syria in its monthly reports to the OPCW, the latest of which being the ninety-first report. The OPCW has gone down a dangerous slippery slope when it adopted at the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention a decision hostile to Syria. This decision was adopted amid a sharp division in States Parties' positions, as a result of the blackmail and pressure brought to bear by well-known States, in a precedent in the history of this Organisation, through levelling false accusations of 'non-compliance' against—and suspending the rights of—a Member State which joined the Organisation of its own free will and has been cooperating with its Technical Secretariat transparently, effectively, and constructively over the past eight years.

The adoption of the decision by 45% of the votes of the States Parties, in the absence of consensus and without the support of the majority of the States Parties, makes it a politicised decision *par excellence*. The decision is a reflection of false reports replete with misleading and fabricated conclusions by the so-called Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Since the day this team was established, Syria and other States Parties refused to recognise its legitimacy and the outcome of its investigations, which are marred by legal and technical problems and which were based on the unprofessional conclusions and analyses of the

Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). The FFM has investigated alleged incidents in Syria in a manner inconsistent with its Terms of Reference, failing to adhere to the fundamental principles provided for in the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as to the principles of professionalism, credibility, and impartiality. The FFM ignored the working methods set out in the Verification Annex, which emphasises that the Technical Secretariat's teams shall visit the site of each alleged incident and that its experts shall collect the samples by themselves and maintain their chain of custody. Moreover, the FFM relied entirely on "open sources" publishing false information spread by intelligence circles that are hostile to Syria, or on misleading information obtained from "distorted open sources" or from terrorist organisations, such as the White Helmets. In its reports, the Technical Secretariat relied on samples which do not meet the OPCW's minimum sampling standards. Under the pretext of witness and information protection, the FFM always avoids answering questions regarding witnesses, their testimonies, their locations, and their identities, without explaining the basic criteria it relied on in assessing these testimonies.

The decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties at its Twenty-Fifth Session is clear evidence of the extreme methods of manipulation and exploitation. The alarming level of misinformation practiced by the States behind this decision shrouded in false slogans and claims must not blind us to its real objective, which is to create a new serious precedent for those States to pass decisions serving their goals.

My country has always demonstrated its full and permanent readiness to cooperate with the OPCW in a manner that guarantees its rights in an atmosphere that is free from pressure and politicisation. There is no truth in the claims by anyone present here that Syria failed to cooperate at any moment from the day of its accession until today. All activities, rounds of consultations and inspections, visits, and missions were carried out according to arrangements agreed by the two parties, always consistent with their respective commitments.

In this vein, we reiterate our call to the OPCW and its Director-General to give due attention to the calls for addressing the genuine concerns and to take heed of the substantive observations made by a number of States Parties, including Syria, as well as by a large number of experts and academics with respect to the FFM reports on the alleged incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria, particularly the report on the Douma incident. The OPCW's disregard for the substantive observations and legitimate queries made by distinguished figures, specialised experts, and eminent academics; its constant disregard for the scientific, technical, and legal concerns raised by the studies submitted by the States Parties' authorities and experts; and its refusal to reconsider those concerns before the competent experts and specialised bodies is unacceptable. It puts at risk the credibility of the OPCW's work before the States Parties and the world and raises doubts as to the keenness of its officials to maintain the professionalism and objectivity of its work, especially when they read out biased data in international fora in a failed attempt to give international legitimacy to the OPCW's flawed reports and the unprofessional conduct of some OPCW officials at various levels.

My country considers unacceptable the double-standard approach adopted by the Technical Secretariat. The latter accepts information, witnesses, and evidence presented by unreliable sources, such as the White Helmets terrorist group, receiving them in a neighbouring country and giving them full credibility, while ignoring the scientific and technical information and evidence and the reports provided by the official authorities of a State Party to the Convention, such as Syria, on the use of chemical weapons by other parties, or accounts of eyewitnesses to the incident. My country views as a clear violation of the Convention the fallacies included in

the report on the alleged 2018 Saraqib incident and the violation in the investigations into this incident of the principles of verification and investigation set out in the Convention, including paragraphs 52 and 56 of Part II of the Verification Annex, on inspectors taking samples themselves and how to handle and maintain those samples, which is the principle of the chain of custody; as well as paragraphs 62 and 63 of Part II of the Verification Annex on the preparation of final reports, the inclusion of differing views, and soliciting the opinion of the State Party concerned. The report looks as if it was drafted to serve as a news report, rather than a technical report issued by a specialised organisation, as well as to equate terrorists' crimes and transgressions with the bravery of the Syrian Arab Army in discharging its national duty of defending the territory and the homeland.

Nonetheless, Syria welcomed the FFM without any restrictions and cooperated fully with it during its visit to Syria from 13 April to 2 May 2021 to complete investigation into incidents of chemical weapons use by terrorists against Syrian civilians and the Syrian Arab Army. The FFM had already visited the Governorate of Hama and the city of Salamiyah four times: in December 2017, September 2018, October 2019, and December 2019. During these visits, Syria provided the FFM with all possible facilities. The FFM was also granted access to documents and interviews with the individuals concerned with those incidents, as well as all that the team requested. More than three years have elapsed since these incidents occurred, but until now the FFM has neither completed its investigations nor issued its final report on the incidents. The FFM was also provided with documented evidence regarding the alleged 2016 Kafr Zita incident and said simply: "we are still gathering information and we will analyse it".

What is deplorable is that the US Administration and its allies have unleashed an avalanche of allegations regarding claims of chemical weapons use in Syria. They reached conclusions, issued verdicts, and violated the sovereignty of another State Party, playing the roles of policeman, investigator, and judge at one and same time. They did so in the two cases on which the OPCW either had not yet conducted an investigation or had previously submitted reports indicating the absence at the site concerned of any chemical activities which are prohibited and inconsistent with Syria's obligations under the Convention and that no chemicals had been detected in the analysis results of the samples taken from the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), nor any activities requiring further attention or 'uncertainties'. Those reports also commended Syria for its cooperation and for providing the Organisation's teams with all facilities. The report on the seventh round of inspection of the SSRC is one of those reports which unfortunately were not—and will not be—reflected in the Director-General's monthly reports.

To the two previous cases I add a third case, which is the advance on the ground by the Syrian Arab Army in its war on terrorism. The United States Administration itself is not qualified to speak of cases of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and with any international convention, considering its disgraceful historical record of continued violations of the provisions of international conventions and its manufacturing, development, and the use of all types of weapons of mass destruction against the peoples of the States Parties present today. Of course, it is not surprising that this attitude coincides with important positive changes taking place in Syria to undermine its national choices, destroy its civilisational achievements, and fragment its territorial integrity.

My country is of the view that this decision is part of the endeavour of the United States and some of its satellite States to hamper the efforts of the Syrian Government to restore security and stability throughout the country, mislead the public opinion, and create justifications and pretexts for a new aggression on Syrian territories.

The Director-General briefed the United Nations Security Council at its session of 3 June 2021. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Head of the National Authority, addressed to the Director-General a letter enclosed to the Mission's note No. 51 of 23 June 2021, on the content of the briefing. We requested the Technical Secretariat to circulate the letter to the States Parties, to issue it as an official document of the current session of the Executive Council, and to post it on the public website and external server of the Organisation. We are still waiting for the Technical Secretariat to do so.

The crimes of terrorist organisations of different denominations against the Syrian people, including their use of chemical weapons, have become well known to all, just like the regional and international parties behind them. Syria has been keen to provide the OPCW Secretariat and the Security Council periodically and officially with the information available to it on the activities carried out by terrorists, including on the transfer and possession of toxic chemicals and preparations for false-flag chemical attacks in order to accuse the Syrian Arab Army. In this regard, over 200 notes have been sent, without any reaction to them from the Technical Secretariat. We call upon the OPCW not to ignore that information, and we emphasise the need to give it serious attention and to deal with it with the utmost responsibility, consistent with the Organisation's mandate as set out in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Seventh Session of the Executive Council and be posted on the public website and external server of the Organisation.

Thank you.

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