



OPCW

Executive Council

Ninety-Seventh Session
6 – 8 July 2021

EC-97/NAT.48
6 July 2021
ARABIC and ENGLISH only

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
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(F)**

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I would like to reaffirm Syria’s firm position condemning the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances.

Syria welcomed the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) without any restrictions and cooperated with it fully. It allowed the FFM and all its teams to enter Syria and conduct sampling and other missions. It signed documents with the OPCW to organise the Mission’s work in Syria, which is evidence that it does not refuse to cooperate and does not hide anything. Instead, it seeks the truth.

In this framework, Syria received the FFM from 13 April to 2 May 2021 to complete the investigation into the 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, the Syrian State provided the FFM with all possible facilities. The FFM was also granted access to documents and interviews with the individuals concerned with the incidents, and was given all that the team requested.

It has been more than three years since these incidents occurred, but until now the FFM has neither completed its investigations nor issued its final report on those incidents. The FFM also received documented evidence on the alleged 2016 Kafr Zita incident and simply said: “we are still gathering information and we will analyse it”.

Unfortunately, the FFM is suffering from dysfunction in its operating methods. This requires reconsideration of those methods to realign them with the Convention and its provisions, as well as with the principles of professionalism, credibility, and impartiality. For us and for many States, the FFM has lost its credibility and proved to be biased in many of its reports, such as the reports on the Khan Shaykhun incident (2017), the Aleppo incident (2018), and the alleged Douma incident whose report is marred by scandals and falsification. There is nothing professional in relying on fabricated posts on suspicious social media sites, or relying on fabricated information, fake witnesses, and alleged samples brought to the OPCW by sources with terrorist affiliations well-known to all, which contradicts the most basic principles of



sampling. It was sufficient for the FFM to see a fake piece of news published on a fake page in order to mobilise its personnel and (OPCW) resources, chasing a mirage. On the other hand, the FFM, under the pretext of lack of supporting evidence, ignores documented information provided by Syria. We have not received any queries from the OPCW regarding any of the 200 notes including documented information on terrorist activities in Syria.

All of this was done deliberately to reach dangerous conclusions and transfer them to another team with yet less professionalism and legitimacy, as a prelude to imposing sanctions unprecedented at the OPCW on a State Party that has demonstrated full cooperation since joining the Organisation.

In this regard, we are still waiting for the Technical Secretariat to circulate to the States Parties our note No. 55, dated 23 June 2021. This note confirms the existence of evidence that Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which is associated with Al-Qaeda, staged a chemical attack on Syrian civilians in the countryside of the Governorate of Idlib. Chemicals were transferred from Turkey to a laboratory for terrorists in the Atmeh border village, where chlorine gas would be manufactured. Subsequently, the so-called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham plans to fill projectiles with chlorine gas to use it against Syrian civilians and blame the attack on the Syrian Arab Army. The Syrian Arab Republic holds the States supporting those terrorists responsible for the Syrian blood which may be shed if this crime is committed without any moral or civilisational scruples. We also request the OPCW not to ignore this information and to deal with it with the utmost responsibility, consistent with its mandate under the Convention.

FFM documents indicate that there are around 400 allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria from open sources. If the FFM has investigated less than 100 incidents over seven years (based on the FFM's own figures) and issued no more than five reports a year, how many years will the FFM need to finish its work? 50, 60, or 70 years?

The formation known as the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is in no better condition. The IIT was established for one objective: to condemn Syria in preparation for further pressure. This is why it adopts working methods that are completely incompatible with the Convention and with the working methods it provides for.

We heard claims about the adaptation of OPCW rules regarding sampling methods in order to accept pictures and what some call samples provided by terrorist groups. This is a perilous logic which cannot be accepted. If the OPCW working methods have allowed the adaptation of rules to accept samples from States, these rules can by no means be adapted to accept material from terrorist groups. This is a serious precedent opening the door for countless problems for all States Parties, as any terrorist organisation may submit to the OPCW any sample prepared by that terrorist organisation and accuse any of your States. The OPCW would investigate those samples, thus turning into a platform for settling political scores. Is this what the States Parties have agreed when they established the OPCW or when they joined it? Is this the spirit of consensus required to free the world from chemical weapons?

On the other hand, what evidence is there that the alleged samples on which the team based this entire investigation were taken from the site of the alleged incident? What is the proof that the pictures taken for the so-called sampling process represent indeed the alleged site or even that the site is inside Syria? What is the proof that those are indeed samples? The truth is that there is no evidence of the existence of a sample from the alleged site of the incident.

Anyone wishing to follow the holistic approach to investigation must begin from the start. Is there any use of chemical weapons? Do not be deceived by the smoke screen created around this issue. The military operations, telecommunications, and flight movements in the region are no evidence. The alleged motives, the alleged orders to units based on social media posts, the opinions of experts on the information they were instructed to provide, and other so-called evidence associated with the overall format and surrounding circumstances do not change the fact that there is no credible physical evidence of the existence of a chemical substance. There is no certainty that it was taken from the site of the incident in a scientific way and that it was not placed there. But all that the IIT, and before it the FFM, provided was information taken remotely to level serious accusations with grave implications.

Unfortunately, OPCW teams shifted to remote investigation in many cases and turned into organs preparing half-cooked reports, granting deeds of innocence and issuing convictions according to the whims and agendas of the States taking hold of the Organisation. It has become clear that this team was established to secure an access door for terrorist organisations' agendas and accusations into the OPCW in order to present them as legitimate and scientific documents with international credibility talking about "reasonable grounds" and "likelihoods".

The Syrian National Authority is preparing a scientific and technical study on the IIT report on the alleged incident in Saraqib. We hope that once released, the study will not face the fate of the previous legal and technical study that was prepared by the Syrian National Authority regarding the first IIT report on the alleged incidents in Ltamenah, which was sent to the OPCW on 26 June 2020.

In a word, while Syria is working hard to implement its obligations under the Convention in good faith and with transparency, there is a systematic effort focused on preventing that work from being seen, while giving voice to allegations based on the narratives of terrorists who kill the Syrian people and providing them with a free platform in order to impose prohibitive conditions through oppressive vote to use the OPCW as a tool for persecuting the States Parties.

The Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic requests that this statement be considered an official document of the session and be posted on the public website and external server of the Organisation.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

--- 0 ---