



**OPCW**

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**FRANCE**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC 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 Ambassadors,

Ten years.

It has now been 10 years since the Syrian people peacefully took to the streets to demand that their most basic rights be respected. We all know the horror story that followed, which led to one of the gravest humanitarian crises since the Second World War. The images that bear witness to this have been emerging from Syria for already a decade. The screening of the documentary *The Cave*, as well as the side event organised in conjunction with the Danish delegation under the aegis of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which is currently chaired by France, reminded us just how unbearable these images are. We cannot allow this tragedy to last a decade longer.

We know this: the Syrian conflict marked the return of the use of chemical weapons, which has been prohibited for nearly a century. Our Organisation, whose twenty-fifth anniversary we will celebrate next year, was established specifically to ensure compliance with this prohibition and to work for a world free from chemical weapons.

And yet the Syrian regime's use of these horrendous weapons is undeniable. The lies that we have heard for seven years do not stand up to the facts. This use of chemical weapons has been documented on numerous occasions, first by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), and then by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The survivors are also here to tell the tale.

I will not get into the legitimacy of the decision of the Conference of the States Parties ("the Conference") at its Fourth Special Session in June 2018, taken by a majority of the States Parties, which led to the establishment of the IIT. We have already discussed that in this forum. On 8 April 2020, the IIT published its first report, which was robust, substantiated, and detailed, and the result of independent and impartial work.



The IIT pursued several lines of inquiry and, as its investigation unfolded, ruled out any irrelevant hypotheses in order to reach the only scientifically possible conclusion. We are now certain that the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah belong to units of the Air Force of the Syrian regime.

The IIT report brought to light three violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). Chemical weapons were used in violation of Article I. If the Syrian regime continued to use toxic chemicals for military purposes after the end of the official destruction of its declared arsenal, it means that it retained the capability to make and use these weapons and that, as a result, its initial declaration was not exhaustive, which is a violation of Article III of the Convention. Finally, by refusing to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and refusing to issue visas and provide information to the IIT, it violated paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. These violations are unacceptable and we, the States Parties, cannot accept them.

The IIT just issued its second report on 12 April 2021, concluding once again that the Syrian regime is responsible for the chemical attack in Saraqib on 4 February 2018. There can no longer be any doubt. The repeated violations of the Convention by the Syrian regime have again been brought to light. We cannot sit on the fence.

By adopting the decision proposed by my delegation on behalf of 40 States Parties, the Executive Council (“the Council”) at its Ninety-Fourth Session took action within the framework of its mandate. The decision offered Syria a chance to redress the situation. As emphasised in Director-General’s report of 14 October 2020, Syria nonetheless failed to follow up on the decision, providing absolutely none of the information requested. We deplore this missed opportunity for Syria to comply with its international obligations.

In accordance with the decision adopted by the Council, it is now up to the Conference to take action. Paragraph 20 of Article VIII of the Convention is clear: it is up to the Conference to determine the degree of compliance, or lack of thereof, with the Convention. And this is indeed the question before us today.

In view of the fact that these obligations continue to be flouted, France submitted the draft decision before us today, on behalf of 46 delegations from four geographical regions. We find ourselves in an exceptional situation, which demands that we take appropriate measures as a result. Do not be fooled: the proposal to suspend the rights and privileges of Syria, as provided for under Article XII of the Convention, is not aimed at excluding Syria from the organs of the OPCW. This country will continue to be able to express itself at the OPCW in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures. The draft decision that we support is therefore extremely balanced, in view of the seriousness of the matter at hand, namely the violation of the very core of the Convention.

You are already aware of my country’s commitment to fighting against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. It is why today we urge all of the States Parties to support this text. Ten years after the start of the conflict in Syria, we cannot allow ourselves to become indifferent. We also have a collective responsibility as States Parties to the Convention. We owe it to the Syrian people, who continue to hope for a political solution, which we support, and which must comply with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

I should also like to acknowledge here before you the involvement of civil society actors who helped to establish the facts, at times at great risk to their lives.

I will conclude by quoting these words, which are not my own but those of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who spoke them on 30 November 2020 on the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare:

“It is imperative that those who use, or have used, chemical weapons are identified and held accountable. That is the only way to meet our moral responsibility to the victims of chemical warfare.”

The issue before us today is critically important for the Organisation. We wish for a debate to take place. If no consensus can be found on the draft decision that we have put forward, we would ask that the matter be decided by roll-call vote, in accordance with Rule 72 of the Rules of Procedure.

I would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Conference and that it be published on the internal and external servers of the OPCW.

Thank you.

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