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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MILAD ATIEH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO
THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 7(C)**

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Members of the Executive Council,

I. Regarding the reports by the Director-General and the Syrian monthly reports

In all its monthly reports, Syria has laid out the non-objective information contained in the reports by the Director-General of the OPCW, including in particular the last six reports (the 101st, the 100th, the ninety-ninth, the ninety-eighth, the ninety-seventh, and the ninety-sixth reports). These reports formed the basis and provided the pretext for levelling false, baseless accusations against Syria. Nevertheless, the Director-General continued to produce monthly reports that did not contain accurate information. This prompted Dr Faisal Mekdad, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and Head of the Syrian National Authority, to address two letters to the Director-General, outlining in a precise and objective manner the errors and non-objective information contained in those reports. I quote the following from the first letter sent by H.E. Minister Dr Mekdad in December 2021: “It is deplorable that the Director-General’s monthly reports turn into an integral part of, and even incite, the baseless campaign waged by Western States against Syria. This is unacceptable and needs to be carefully examined and reconsidered; for such conduct, which is unprecedented in the history of the OPCW, constitutes a clear departure on the part of the Director-General from his mandate under the Convention and the provisions of its Article VIII, paragraph 1, which stipulates that the States Parties to the Convention have established the Organisation ‘to achieve the object and purpose of this Convention, [and] to ensure the implementation of its provision’, as well as the provisions of Article VIII, paragraph 46. Therefore, the OPCW should not be a source of unverified reports or a source of fabricated or fake information. Also, the Director-General should be most committed to implementing the provisions of the Convention and an impartial and unbiased party. He should not take sides or adopt a hostile position against a State Party in order to serve the political agendas of some States. This is because the Director-General represents all States Parties in the Organisation and is the highest authority in the Technical Secretariat”.



II. Regarding the Declaration Assessment Team

Before turning to the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and its report to the current session of the Council, my country's delegation would like to address the following constant and fundamental issues:

1. The DAT was established to assist Syria in making its initial declaration definitively complete. It is not an investigation or inspection team.
2. Some of the technical and scientific issues under discussion between the Syrian National Authority and the DAT relate to different technical and scientific interpretations. Therefore, this is a process that cannot be resolved in a hasty and selective manner.
3. Syria has never refused to receive the DAT over the past eight years, and arrangements regarding the team's visits to Syria were usually agreed upon between both sides, in line with their respective commitments.
4. On 20 November 2018, Dr Faisal Mekdad, the then Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of the Syrian National Authority, agreed with the Director-General to continue consultations with the aim of moving forward with all matters related to the Syrian dossier through structured and constructive dialogue. Accordingly, Syria has been working very seriously and cooperating in a constructive manner. It has proposed to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW many transparency measures and actions that are not provided for in the Convention, with a view to resolving issues relating to its initial declaration. It has provided the DAT with facilitations unmatched by any other State Party to the Convention. According to the statistics mentioned in its report that is in front of you, the DAT conducted dozens of visits to the declared sites, collected hundreds of samples from those sites, interviewed more than one hundred individuals in relation to the Syrian chemical programme, and held over one hundred technical meetings. The Syrian National Authority has submitted hundreds of documents, especially since 2016. Many achievements have been made and much progress has been achieved to resolve the outstanding issues.

Regarding the actual practice and positions of some Western States concerning the Syrian initial declaration, we state the following facts:

- Some Western States have worked to turn the DAT and its reports into a tool for political pressure and blackmail against Syria, using the team as a vehicle for levelling false accusations against Syria.
- What helped those States implement their political agenda is their reliance on fragmented and false information contained in some reports issued by the OPCW and the Director-General regarding the Syrian initial declaration. They anticipated everything and made their false accusations.

Regarding the twenty-fifth round of consultations, I would like to make the following clarifications:

- Numerous Western States accused Syria of obstructing and even refusing to hold this round of consultations. We regret to say that the latest reports by the Director-General were formulated in a way that suggested that the Syrian Arab Republic refused to hold the twenty-fifth round of consultations. Until recently, these reports contained a text stating clearly that Syria refused to grant all members of that team the required visas to enter Syrian territories. This has never happened. Those States adopted hasty and wrong positions, levelled false accusations against Syria, and did not bother to seek the truth.
- The truth, ladies and gentlemen, is that, in all its communications with the Technical Secretariat, Syria has been affirming its willingness to hold this round of consultations and has welcomed holding it in Damascus or in The Hague, as proposed by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation.
- When the Technical Secretariat requested that this round be held in April and May 2021, the Syrian National Authority and its Head had pre-scheduled commitments, some of which were related to important Syrian internal constitutional events.
- We were surprised by the announcement by the Director-General, during his briefing to the Security Council on 3 June 2021, that the DAT deployment to Syria had been suspended until after the summer of 2021. In its ninety-second monthly report, dated 15 July 2021, Syria regretted that this round was suspended because it had a real interest in closing and finalising this dossier in order to prevent its exploitation and politicisation and because it did not hide anything at all in relation to its chemical programme.
- Without going into detail, Syria, in subsequent communications, affirmed its readiness to receive the DAT at a time which the Technical Secretariat deems convenient. At the same time, Syria requested that one DAT member be replaced by any other member whom the Technical Secretariat deems suitable. However, on 10 November 2021, the Technical Secretariat replied that it would not deploy the DAT until Syria grants the required visas to all DAT members.
- On 1 March 2022, the Syrian Mission received from the Technical Secretariat a request in which it expressed its readiness to deploy the DAT to Syria. On 3 March 2022, the Technical Secretariat was informed that the Technical Secretariat's Note was under consideration by the Syrian National Authority and that we will keep the Technical Secretariat informed of further developments in that matter.

This is what happened in brief. The question now is: who is impeding the holding of this round of consultations? In 2017, Syria requested the former Director-General to replace two members of an inspection team, and this sovereign request was accommodated. There was none of this fuss.

An important question must be raised here: aren't there any experts and inspectors in the Organisation other than the inspector whom Syria asked to be replaced? If intentions are good, then the sovereign position of the State Party must be respected. Certainly, Syria must have its own objective reasons to take such a stand.

Do you not see that there is a deliberate, faulty intention regarding this matter? Syria has been dealing with the DAT since 2013 and, throughout that long period, has never hampered the work of this team. This is evidence of Syria's willingness and sincere intention to close this dossier.

III. Regarding the Fact-Finding Mission

While the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) is receiving blind endorsement and support from some States for blatant political reasons, Syria, along with many other States, has voiced on more than one occasion its concern over the grave and serious flaws in the working methods of the FFM and its departure from the substance and provisions of the Convention, the Verification Annex, and its own Terms of Reference (Note by the Technical Secretariat S/1255/2015, dated 10 March 2015). Facts and practical experience in relation to the FFM have proven that, since it started issuing its reports on some alleged incidents, the FFM is consistently working in a manner that is far from professionalism and integrity.

Unfortunately, the substantive observations on the Mission's working methods and reports did not receive any attention from the Technical Secretariat and some Western States. The FFM continued to issue false reports with questionable findings.

Below are a few observations on the work of the FFM which has not changed its approach until now:

1. Most of the incidents under investigation occurred many years ago. How can a fair and impartial investigation be conducted into incidents based on outdated evidence and witnesses and in the absence of any samples or evidence?
2. The FFM does not visit the sites of the alleged incidents. It conducts its investigations remotely, relying in its reports on open sources, in the absence of any material evidence or legitimate chain of custody for samples, as required by its Terms of Reference.
3. The FFM is deliberately ignoring all the corroborated information provided by the Government of Syria, a State Party to the Convention, regarding incidents involving the use of toxic chemicals, adopting instead all information provided by the various terrorist groups or by parties that are openly hostile to Syria.

Regarding the report on the alleged Kafr Zeita incident (1 October 2016)

Based upon a preliminary reading of the report, we would like to make the following observations:

1. The report's findings rely on an alleged cylinder received from the terrorist White Helmets group long after the alleged incident. The cylinder was not fitted with any explosives, detonation system, or aerodynamic stabilisation system.

2. The report also relied on the testimonies of poorly performing actors, referred to in the report as “first responders” (White Helmets) and the testimonies of the medical staff, almost five years after the alleged incident. Nevertheless, the FFM fell in the trap of obvious inconsistency and contradiction in the testimonies of the White Helmets, the witnesses, and the medical staff, some of whom stated that one barrel was dropped, while others stated that two barrels were dropped, etc.
3. Concerning environmental and biological samples, the FFM acknowledges that it did not receive any such samples and did not visit the site of the incident, which is contrary to the most basic rules of a fair and just investigation, as provided for in the Convention and in the FFM’s Terms of Reference.
4. Concerning open sources relied upon by the FFM, we have consulted them through the footnotes of the reports. We found out that the great majority of these sources are websites belonging to the so-called “Syrian opposition”.
5. In its report, the FFM ignored all the information provided by the Syrian National Authority throughout the previous period, including documented testimonies of five witnesses who were provided by Syria and whose testimonies were received by the FFM during its visits to Damascus in April 2021. This is in addition to documented information provided to the FFM in five notes verbales during the period from 2017 to 2020.
6. All photographs of the alleged cylinder and its parts, and the photograph of the crater confirm that there is no scientific or material evidence that the cylinder was dropped from the air. The FFM should have consulted with specialists in physics, engineering, and mechanical engineering to ascertain the veracity of those allegations, instead of adopting them blindly. If the cylinder had fallen randomly, given that it was lacking an aerodynamic stabilisation system, from a scientific point of view the whole body of the cylinder, not only its front part, should have been damaged.
7. As for the alleged crater, it looked circular and homogeneous on all sides and did not result from the cylinder’s impact with the surface of the ground. What was stated in the report is false from the physical and mechanical point of view and confirms that the cylinder was placed manually. The same applies to the two ventilation openings in the terrorist groups’ command post, of which the report contained no photographs.

In view of all of the above, allow us to state the truth, which is as follows:

The fake scenario of chemical weapons use in Kafr Zeita looks more like a play by Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*). The foggy, truncated, and fragmented dialogue is lacking coherence, consistency, and balance, just like in the Kafr Zeita fake scenario. Only the FFM knew who Godot was: the Syrian Arab Army. The FFM did not conduct any investigation. It gathered data mostly from dubious, spiteful sources, some of which are linked to and serve the agendas of certain Western States. Did the FFM analyse the data? How? The FFM brought the data and information obtained into subjection in a selective manner, putting it under extreme pressure and forcing it to make the “confession” it desires. The findings did not convince anyone, except for those who agree with the FFM at the political and ideological levels only, not at the professional, integrity, and fairness levels. A fair investigation seeks the truth.

My question to everyone is as follows: what is the interest of the Syrian Arab Army in using a chlorine barrel or cylinder that would in most cases lead to breathing difficulties, whereas traditional weapons can achieve much better results on the ground than chlorine that causes shortness of breath? This is because, according to the false scenario, the cylinder was dropped in an open area.

I tell you, in all honesty, that as soon as the report was issued and before even reading it, we knew what the FFM's finding would be. Not because we are fortune-tellers, but because we know the truth. Here is the FFM quoting from a previous report the same content and the same conclusion, with different people and different actors. Two phrases resonate in our minds: either "there are reasonable grounds to believe", which is a dull and pitiful repetition that reflects a reckless and immature attitude towards investigation; or that the FFM, based on all the information obtained and analysed, could not establish whether or not chemicals were used as a weapon in the incident. It is no longer a secret that the aim of these reports and fake scenarios is to keep Syria under constant political, diplomatic, legal, economic, financial, and humanitarian pressure, in order to keep it always busy and overwhelmed by this pressure and its ramifications on the Syrian domestic arena and to legitimise all this through reports and decisions that are unfortunately issued by this Organisation. The goal is to maximise disinformation, exaggeration, distortion, and falsification.

What happened during the briefing session held by the United Nations Security Council on 5 January 2022 to discuss the ninety-ninth monthly report by the Director-General was striking. During that session, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations stated the following: "The Fact-Finding Mission's most recent trip to Syria, which concluded last month, collected essential information on four chemical weapons-use incidents in 2017. These facts help hold the Syrian regime accountable for its chemical weapons use and uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention". The question is: who provided the Ambassador with this information, if it is true? Is this the conclusion that the FFM must include in its report, as it did in the report on the Douma incident?

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Ninth Session of the Executive Council and posted on the OPCW's public website and on Catalyst.

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